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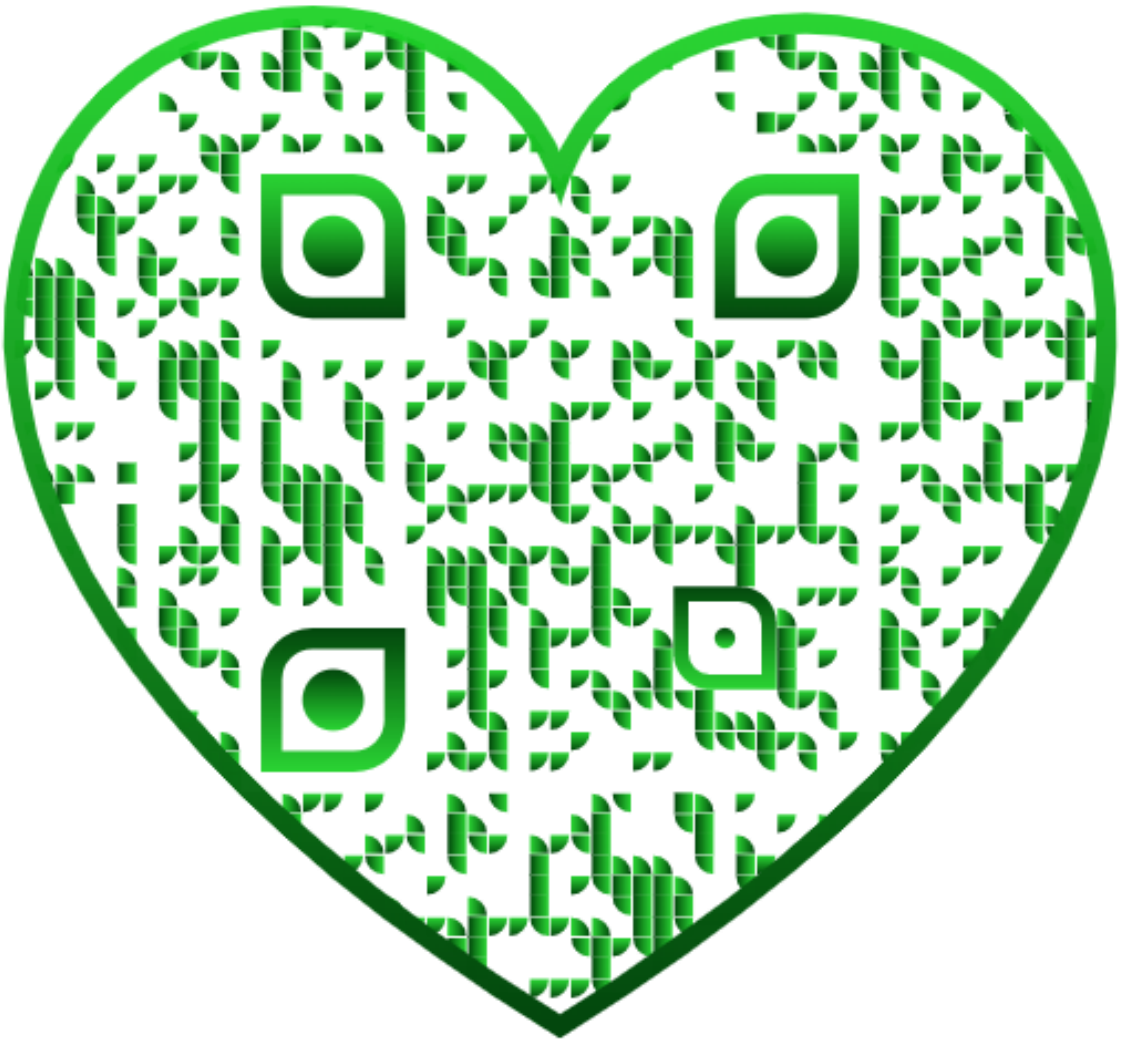
LAURA VAN DER HEIJDEN

THE YOUNG BRITISH CELLO STAR ON FINDING HER MUSICAL PATH AND RECORDING HER FIRST ALBUM OF CONCERTOS



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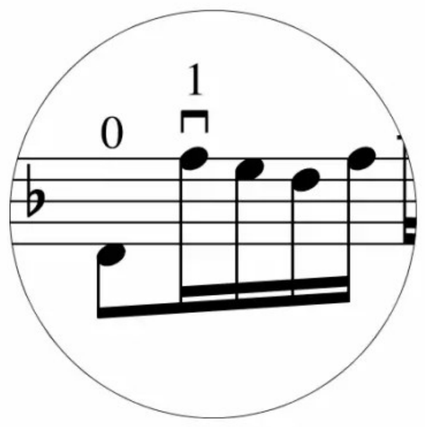

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Long before the phrase 'portfolio career' was coined, resourceful string players have been finding ways to diversify and thrive: playing in orchestral and chamber ensembles, teaching, composing, fixing, even being entrepreneurial impresarios. And particularly since the pandemic and subsequent strictures on arts funding, all musicians have to work harder to find opportunities.

Take the piano trio, for example. This chamber grouping has a rich repertoire, but as Charlotte Gardner explains on page 46, unlike string quartets, there are very few professional piano trios that are full-time groups and their members usually have other major strands to their careers. Despite, or maybe even because of this, the genre does seems to be flourishing.

But artists don't diversify only for practical or financial reasons; even star soloists feel the need to find other outlets for their creativity, and this includes the British cellist Laura van der Heijden, who positively seeks out new musical experiences. 'It's not one career for life,' she tells Toby Deller on page 26.

Even luthier Roger Hansell (My Space, page 68) considered pursuing a tandem career as an artist when he first began his professional life, but he found he just didn't have the time. Might it have been possible if he was starting out today?

Also this issue we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Henschel Quartet – definitely a full-time ensemble. Ahead of concerts at the Aldeburgh Festival this month, where the quartet made its debut back in 1994, Andrew Stewart speaks to violist Monika Henschel-Schwind on page 38 about the group's longevity and how three decades seem to have gone by in a flash.

And on page 32, US violin maker Korinthia A. Klein shares how she goes about creating a harmonious experience between staff and customers, based on her years of running a busy shop. There is also advice that applies to players who want to know how to get the best out of their relationship with their luthier.

Emma Baker editor
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Cover photo Venetia Jollands

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Contributors

NICOLAS DUPONT

(Technique, page 76)

is a Belgian violinist. He has made 25 recordings and premiered around 90 pieces. He now divides his time between teaching at the Conservatoire Royal de Bruxelles, orchestral leading, and solo and chamber concerts.

COLIN GOUGH

(Acoustic measurements, page 52)

is an emeritus professor of physics at Birmingham University, UK, where he also led the resident Haywood String Quartet for almost 30 years. He combines his scientific and musical interests in leading research on instruments of the violin family.

KORINTHIA A. KLEIN

(Customer relations, page 32)

is a luthier, musician and writer based in Milwaukee, WI, US, where she has run her own shop since 2008. She builds violins and violas, and works to keep student instruments functioning. Her latest book is entitled *My Violin Needs Help! A Repair Diagnostics Guide for Players and Teachers.*

WIM RAYMAEKERS

(Making Matters, page 70)

studied art history at the University of Louvain and violin making in Puurs, Belgium. He has worked as a restorer for the Museum Vleeshuis in Antwerp. From 2012 to 2017 he taught violin making, organology and restoration techniques at the School of Arts of the University College Ghent.

MICHAEL RIEBER

(Masterclass, page 72)

studied the double bass with Ulrich Lau at the Stuttgart University of Music and Performing Arts. He is now first solo double bassist with the NDR Symphony Orchestra Hamburg, and in 2007 was appointed professor for double bass at the city's University for Music and Theatre.

ANDREA SCHUDTZ

(In Focus, page 61)

attended the International School of Violin Making in Cremona, Italy. He now lives and works in Cremona. His instruments are made following the classical models of the Cremonese School, such as Stradivari, Amati and Guarneri 'del Gesù' with a personal touch.

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LETTER *of the* MONTH

MYSTERY FOR THE AGES

While clearing out the house of my late grandfather, my wife came across a violin made in 1889 by the American luthier Jerome Bonaparte Squier. Not having come across the name before, despite being a violinist herself, she typed the name into Google and almost immediately emitted a cry of astonishment. It turned out that a painting of Mr Squier himself had been hanging on the wall of her own grandfather, since before she picked up the violin herself, 40 years ago! It seems that the luthier sat for a painting by the respected artist William Bicknell (*above*), and the artwork now hangs near the cloakroom at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, MA. Given that both of us have spent most of our lives in California, we feel there must be some cosmic meaning to this coincidence!

NICHOLAS CLEARY
Santa Fe Strings, CA, US

PIZZ AND PIECES

Davina Shum's recent Opinion piece ('The problem with pizzicato', April 2024) triggered some thoughts of my own. While I was at the Crane School of Music, SUNY Potsdam, studying the harp as my second instrument, I learnt that a plucked note cannot sustain. Therefore the harpist must make a motion after the pluck, in order to show the style they were going for.

Secondly, I found out from a bass guitarist that a different kind of pizzicato sound can be made with no hand motion, just with a straight finger plucking the string horizontally. To me it gives a more threatening sound, with untold possibilities for interpretation. Finally, many conductors try to cue pizzicato with a downward motion on the beat. However, pizzicato is an upward motion from the string. It would be good if the conductor could arrive a little before the cue and 'give' the pizzicato (as if the baton were plucking the string). I explained this to Edo de Waart, our conductor in the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, when he asked in frustration: 'How do you cue a pizzicato?'

MARILYN KLERX-HARDIE
Malmedy, Belgium

SLUMP DOCTOR

In February's Making Matters article, Christian Bayon touched on a common problem of antique instruments – a slump of the neck angle accompanied by a bulge at the top end of the front (*right*). It should be noted that wood is not a purely elastic material, such as steel, but is subject to 'creep' when stressed. Also, this creep is facilitated by a change in humidity, which in turn changes the moisture content of the wood. This effect was investigated in my own article in the September 1986 issue.

There are various ways in which the slump or bulge can occur. Perhaps the wood was made too thin, or the long profile too steep, at the neck end of the front. Or perhaps the instrument had been kept with string tension, in a place such as an attic, where there are extremes of humidity. Once the bulge starts, neck slump can become a persistent problem. The steep profile of a bulge is not as resistant to creep as a sloping profile.

One way to reduce the problem is to fit a wooden wedge with a leather base, under the end of the fingerboard, when the instrument is not in use. The fingerboard should be lifted with one hand, while inserting with the other, to avoid damaging the varnish.

In extreme cases I have steamed the bulge out, removed some wood underneath, and grafted fresh wood on the

VIOLIN PHOTO CHRISTIAN BAYON

LETTER OF THE MONTH WINS

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surface. This gives a better profile without increasing the thickness appreciably.

Finally, in my opinion, the distorted profile present in some antique instruments should not be copied slavishly by contemporary makers. It is not the same profile as originally made, and will not be as resistant as the original profile.

ALAN BEAVITT
Scoraig, Scotland, UK

ARMENIAN CHAMPION

Many thanks for the recent articles bringing to light the achievements of the lesser-known Russian pedagogues such as Yuri Kramarov (September 2022) and Natalia Shakhosvskaya (March 2023). May I suggest if this series is to continue, that *The Strad* consider an article on the Armenian violinist and tutor Ioannes Nalbandian (1871–1942)? Although virtually forgotten today, he was possibly one of the most influential pedagogues of the 20th century, having mentored such star players as Jascha Heifetz, Efrem Zimbalist and Miron Polyakin. He was also the teaching assistant to Leopold Auer for many years at the St Petersburg Conservatoire, and indeed accompanied Auer when he left for America. Consequently, I believe his own achievements have always been overlooked.

Another of Nalbandian's students in St Petersburg was Yuri Yankelevich, whose name appears in the biographies of numerous Russian violinists, as well as the above-mentioned articles in *The Strad*.

KURT BÖHLER
Innsbruck, Austria

ONLINE COMMENT

Davina Shum's Opinion piece on the teaching of pizzicato touched a few nerves on *The Strad*'s social media pages: (bit.ly/3Qd9Gay)

JEFFREY SOLOW I frequently mention to students that there are two things that are seldom (if ever) practiced but which should be: pizzicato and page turns!

TREBLE STRINGS Owing to the fact that a lot of string players start with pizzicato and learn left and right hand separately for a while, it starts to feel like a beginner thing – something to be left behind with the beginner tunes and bow hold exercises. None of those things should be treated as something to be left behind, and review is good for everyone. But there is so much other stuff to practise, and more music to play than a lifetime allows.

DWIGHT BROWN I think most of us find pizz, col legno, sul ponticello etc. as things we wish they hadn't told composers about. Especially trying to get us to bash the hell out of our good bows.

JANEEN CEPARANO WILKINS Bass players do…

ANDREJ GRILC

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1 The viola's white knight: Hermann Ritter and the quest for the perfect alto instrument bit.ly/3W1thhs

2 'Have faith in the work you do' – violinist Maria Ioudenitch (*below*) tracks her path to a debut tour bit.ly/3Q0EpY4

3 'How do you make that first mistake?' – jazz violinist Scott Tixier on the power of improvisation bit.ly/3TYvZl5

PODCAST OF THE MONTH

the Strad PODCAST

Episode #115: designing your own musical education as an adult learner with violinist Julia Reddy bit.ly/3xJV6Rk

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On the beat

News and events from around the world this month

Read all the breaking news in the string world online **www.thestrad.com**

Alternative measures

With pernambuco in danger of being permanently off limits to bow makers, could another Brazilian hardwood – ipê – be the solution?

By Peter Somerford

An ipê tree flowering in the state of Pará, Brazil

As illegal poaching of pernambuco in its native Atlantic Forest habitat continues, exports of pernambuco bows from Brazil have been prohibited. Under regulations from the Brazilian Institute of Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (IBAMA) the country's bow makers have switched their work to alternative woods such as ipê (a blanket term for species of the genus *Handroanthus*). Ipê is promoted as a sustainable option, but as one of the world's hardest woods, it is in great demand as a decking material, and its high market value makes it particularly vulnerable to illegal logging. At the 19th CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) Conference of the Parties (CoP) in November 2022, ipê joined pernambuco on the CITES Appendix II listing of species threatened by overexploitation, although the new listing came with an implementation deadline of 24 months. As well as requiring CITES permits for exports of wood from Brazil, the new controls could also affect ipê supply and prices more widely; some new Brazilian-made ipê bows are already selling for nearly as much as their pernambuco predecessors.

As a wood for bow making, ipê compares favourably to pernambuco in its physical and mechanical characteristics, including density, hardness, modulus of elasticity (a measure of stiffness) and speed of sound propagation. American bow maker Lynn Hannings, a past president of the International Pernambuco Conservation Initiative USA, says: 'My experience with two ipê bows is that they were strong, with correct weights and balances, and they produced a very bright sound. But when it comes to the use of ipê, I don't see it as a long-term solution as it comes from the same depleted rainforest environment as pernambuco.' As existing stocks of pernambuco, in the hands of artisanal bow makers, continue to service the needs of professional players and the highest-level advanced students, Hannings advocates a move away from tropical hardwoods for new mass-produced or student-level bows. In the Spring 2024 edition of the *Journal of the American Viola Society*, she wrote: 'To support efforts to protect pernambuco and its habitat, I recommend we transition to non-pernambuco, non-wood alternatives or restore existing bows exclusively for bows under $1,000. This would include all student bows, fractional and full-size bows for school departments, rental programmes and beginners of all ages.'

The CITES listing for ipê implies a similar threat risk as that for pernambuco, but such a picture has

DANIEL BELTRA/GREENPEACE

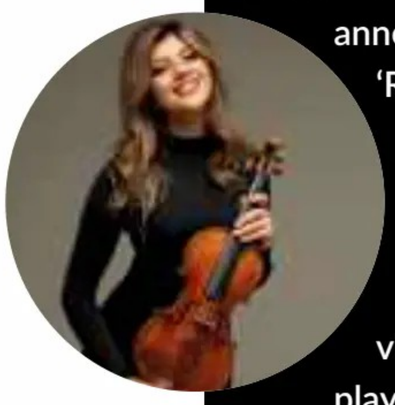
'When it comes to the use of ipê, I don't see it as a long-term solution' *— Lynn Hannings, past president, International Pernambuco Conservation Initiative USA*

been disputed. Daniel Neves, president of Anafima, the Brazilian music industry association, says: 'Unlike pernambuco, ipê is abundant across Brazil.' CITES blanket-listed 35 *Handroanthus* species at CoP19 along with two other genera of flowering Trumpet trees, but although some of the *Handroanthus* species are listed on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List as endangered or near-threatened, others are listed as of least concern. Whereas Brazil proposed unsuccessfully at CoP19 to have pernambuco upgraded to the most restrictive Appendix I listing, it strongly opposed the proposal to add ipê to Appendix II, with Brazil's delegate at the debate arguing: 'Ipê is not even on the verge of being threatened in our country. Almost all our exports of ipê come from sustainable management projects approved and monitored by our government. Trade is not contributing to the decline of the ipê population in our country; quite the opposite. Sustainable management projects are a part of our policy to keep the forest up, to avoid deforestation. When we create new bureaucracy and barriers to trade and when we increase costs, we are discouraging these projects. We are allowing for people who live in the forest to look for other ways of surviving.'

Ipê trees grow slowly and in extremely low densities: according to some estimates, mature trees occur only once in every three to ten hectares of natural forest. While reduced-impact logging practices aim to limit forest degradation, the increased demand for the wood on the international market has led to concerns over sustainability and has fuelled illegal logging, which harms forest biodiversity and ecosystems. A study published in the journal *Nature Sustainability* in July 2023 (bit.ly/3Uq3s9I) found that in the period 2009–19 three-quarters of all ipê from Pará, the top producing region in Brazil, may have been harvested illegally. The study mapped illegality risks at different stages of the timber supply chain, analysing risks due to missing or invalid logging permits, overstated ipê yields or discrepancies resulting from missing inflows of legal timber. The study's authors identified numerous loopholes in Brazil's traceability systems that could be exploited by those intent on laundering illegally logged timber. However, at the end of 2022, IBAMA introduced an enhanced traceability system called DOF+ Traceability, which implements a consistent coding of timber products to allow for full traceability from harvest to consumption or export. Neves says that members of Anafima are now working ipê through this system. 'DOF+ Traceability requires additional paperwork and more rigorous inspections,' he adds, 'and is extremely necessary for greater control over the entire supply chain.'

NEWS IN BRIEF

Violinist Alexandra Tirsu loaned 1717 'Reifenberg' Stradivari bit.ly/3U8qTTC



The Stradivari Society of Chicago has announced the loan of the 1717 'Reifenberg' Antonio Stradivari violin to Moldovan violinist Alexandra Tirsu. The 31-year-old violinist (*left*) previously played on a 1699 Stradivari violin. The 'Reifenberg' has been played by a host of renowned violinists, including Jacques Thibaud, Nathan Milstein, Jaime Laredo and Salvatore Accardo. Most recently it has been in the hands of Dmitry Sitkovetsky.

Alexander Quartet announces retirement bit.ly/3U5Z1j1

The Alexander Quartet has announced its retirement after 44 years, following its final season in the spring of 2025. Now based in San Francisco, the quartet was established in New York in 1981 and currently comprises violinists Zakarias Grafilo and Yuna Lee, violist David Samuel and founding cellist Sandy Wilson. Among its final season highlights, the Alexander Quartet will perform at the Beethoven Easter Festival in Poland, and will conclude residences at the Mondavi Center, St Lawrence University and San Francisco Performances.

Violinist Meret Lüthi receives Golden Bow award bit.ly/3Q9unE0

The Foundation of the Swiss Violin Making School in Brienz has announced Meret Lüthi as the recipient of its 2024 Golden Bow. Lüthi is a violinist and artistic director of the early music orchestra Les Passions de l'Âme. The jury praised Lüthi for sharing her inventiveness and captivating programmes with audiences since 2008.

Do you have a topical story concerning the string music world? Email us at **thestrad@thestrad.com**

OBITUARIES

EDMOND BEART

The Belgian cellist and pedagogue Edmond Baert died on 17 February aged 89. The cellist taught and influenced generations of cello students in his long career.

Born in the Charleroi region in 1934, Baert embarked on his musical studies at the Royal Conservatory of Brussels and the Queen Elisabeth Music Chapel. He later joined the teaching staff at both institutions, after assisting his teacher Maurice Dambois in 1966 at the Royal Conservatory of Brussels. He was considered a leading figure in the Belgian musical world, cultivating a dedicated teaching studio of cellists for over three decades and beyond his retirement in 1997.

In addition to his teaching work, Baert was principal cello of the Belgian National Orchestra and a prolific chamber musician.

Former student Eckart Runge said: 'His great musical, cello and life wisdom will remain exemplary for me, as will his generosity, humour and positivity. He used to say to me with a wink, when I was playing out of tune: "…c'est presque juste!" (it's nearly in tune).'

GEOFFREY MICHAELS

The Australian-born, US-based violinist Geoffrey Michaels died on 17 February at the age of 79.

Born in 1944 in Perth, Western Australia, Michaels began playing the violin at the age of five. He was recognised as a prodigy and at 14 became the youngest performer ever to win the Australian Broadcasting Commission's concerto competition. He then toured Australia as a recitalist and soloist with the major orchestras.

In 1961 at the age of 16, Michaels was admitted to the Curtis Institute of Music where he studied violin with Efrem Zimbalist, and violin and viola with Oscar Shumsky. He was a prizewinner at the Tchaikovsky Competition, the Queen Elisabeth Competition and the Concours Jacques Thibaud in Paris.

While still a student he accepted the Curtis Quartet's invitation to become a member – a position he held until 1969. He was also a founder member of the Philadelphia-based Liebesfreud Quartet. Fellow violinist Philip Kates described Michaels as 'a long-time treasured quartet companion and a personal and professional inspiration'.

Michaels also performed with numerous other chamber ensembles, including the Janus Piano Trio, Performers' Committee for Twentieth Century Music in New York, Richardson Chamber Players in Princeton, and Vancouver New Music Society. His performance of the US premiere of Schnittke's Concerto Grosso was broadcast in both the US and the Soviet Union.

An experienced teacher of violin, viola and chamber music, Michaels based himself in the US and taught at the New School of Music (now part of Temple University), Princeton University, and Swarthmore College. He served as professor at Florida State University and at the University of British Columbia. He performed on a 1733 Carlo Bergonzi violin made in Cremona.

ROGER ZABINSKI

US bow maker Roger Zabinski died of cancer on 27 February. He was 74 years old. Considered a leading bow maker of modern times, Zabinski was a member of the American Federation of Violin and Bow Makers and Entente International des Luthiers et Archetiers (EILA).

Zabinski was born in 1950 and earned a bachelor's degree in music history and literature from the University of Minnesota in 1973. During his studies, he met Vaido Radamus, who trained him in violin making and introduced him to making bows.

In 1976, Zabinski met Martin Beilke, an internationally known bow maker who worked in Minneapolis. Zabinski studied with him until Beilke's death in 1979.

He worked at Clare Givens Violins from 1978 to 1983 before specialising in bow making. In the summer of 1984, Zabinski attended the New Hampshire bow making course, learning the French methods of bow making from William Salchow.

Zabinski was elected a member of the American Federation of Violin and Bow Makers in 1985. The following year he received his journeyman's certificate from that same institution, and was awarded a gold medal for his violin bow at the Violin Society of America (VSA) International Competition. He had since received numerous certificates of workmanship from the VSA.

In May 2011 Zabinksi was elected a member of EILA. He developed composite carbon fibre bows for CodaBow.

Zabinski made over 900 bows over the course of his career. Inspired by early French aesthetic, he used a number of models over the years, including Eugène Sartory, Dominique Peccatte and François Xavier Tourte, before working entirely with his own original pattern, developed from the spirit of the early and mid-19th-century French bow makers. A quartet of his bows are owned by the Smithsonian Institution.

FRANCO FANTINI

The Italian violinist Franco Fantini died on 2 April at the age of 99. He is remembered as having a 40-year affiliation with the Orchestra of the Teatro alla Scala, serving as violinist and concertmaster during his career.

Born on 12 February 1925, Fantini studied with Enrico Polo and Michelangelo Abbado at the Milan Conservatoire. He joined the Teatro alla Scala orchestra in 1942 at the age of 17. Twelve years later, in 1954, he became concertmaster of the orchestra, a post he held for four decades.

During his career Fantini experienced fundamental turning points in La Scala's history, from the reopening with Toscanini in 1946 to the foundation of the Filarmonica della Scala with Claudio Abbado in 1982. He worked with artists such as Victor de Sabata, Arturo Toscanini, Claudio Abbado, Herbert von Karajan, Carlo Maria Giulini, Gianandrea Gavazzeni, Riccardo Muti and Riccardo Chailly.

He was also a member of the Solisti di Milano directed by Angelo Ephrikian, of the Solisti della Scala with Abbado and of the Virtuosi di Roma with Angelo Stefanato. For 15 years he was first violin of the Quartetto della Scala.

A volume of his memoirs collected by his daughter Silvana was published in 2023 by De Ferrari Editore, entitled *Una vita in Scala*.

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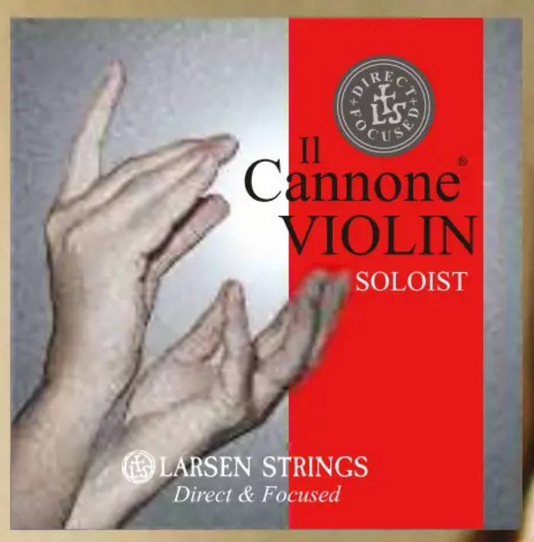

Featured Artist

María Dueñas

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I am deeply grateful to the Nippon Music Foundation for their generous loan of the Stradivarius "Camposelice" (1710) and to the Deutsche Stiftung Musikleben for the Nicolò Gagliano (17?4).

María Dueñas

TOUR OF DUTY: The Kyiv Camerata, Ukraine's leading chamber ensemble, made its first visit to the US in over 25 years in April. The 24-member group performed the North American premieres of works by several Ukrainian composers on the tour, which lasted from 26 April to 4 May. Mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato and the Ukrainian Chorus DUMKA of New York joined the ensemble for its concert at Carnegie Hall on 28 April. 'This is a great way to make a loud statement about the ensemble, Ukrainian culture and Ukrainian music, now more than ever,' said double bassist Nazarii Stets, 'because it's also a method of fighting – a fight for freedom, a fight for identity.' Photo: courtesy USA for Ukraine

PREMIERE *of the* MONTH

Feeling dandy

The Black dandyism fashion movement spawns a new cello concerto

COMPOSER **Nathalie Joachim**
WORK ***Had to Be***
ARTISTS **Seth Parker Woods (vc) Spoleto Festival USA Orchestra/Timothy Myers**
DATE **1 June 2024**
PLACE **Charleston Gaillard Center, Charleston, SC, US** bitly.ws/3ihnY

Seth Parker Woods

Nathalie Joachim

'The starting point was a conversation with Seth about the Black dandyism movement,' says Haitian–American composer Nathalie Joachim about her new cello concerto *Had to Be* for US cellist Seth Parker Woods. 'African American men appropriated European fashion by subverting preconceived understandings of Black manhood.' These ideas of subverting expectations inspired a concerto that pays homage to the African diaspora and Black musical styles.

The first movement, 'Homegoing', begins with an off-stage brass band playing a hymn-like passage. It evokes the Haitian funeral procession and takes its title from the colloquial name for the ceremony in Black American communities. 'The music starts from a place of collectivity, subverting the notion of a concerto itself,' says Joachim. The cello then emerges with a melody 'akin to a gospel solo vocalist'. The second movement, 'Flare', brings 'the audacity of jazz' in its rhythms, and the two-against-three polyrhythms of West African music. 'The orchestral writing shifts rhythmic proportions and really forces them to swing, and not just like a caricature of jazz.' It is accompanied by 'big colourful statements', with the solo cello part dancing alongside the orchestra.

In the third movement, 'With Grace', melodies are gradually layered over each other. 'Mantras and prayer come through in African diasporic music,' says Joachim. 'It's the idea of ruminating on a single idea for a long time to invoke transcendence.' The music ultimately reaches a full tutti moment followed by a unison ostinato by the vibraphone and piano. The cello makes a heavenly ascent and eventually disappears 'like smoke rising'. 'Seth really shines in lyrical playing, and he is also a fantastic chamber musician,' adds Joachim. 'I wanted to play to those strengths in this concerto.'

Woods says about the piece: '*Had to Be* is a homage to radical joy, disruption and community, rooted and backed by the Black dandyism movement. Joachim has created a dense and colourful playground for me to get lost in and I cannot wait for audiences to hear and witness it!'

WOODS PHOTO BEN GIBBS. JOACHIM PHOTO ERIN PATRICE O'BRIEN

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COMPETITIONS

Javus Quartet

Yuki Hirano

Maxine Gimbel

❶ The Vienna-based **Javus Quartet** has received the 2024 **Jürgen Ponto Foundation Music Prize**, receiving €60,000 and concert engagements. The quartet comprises violinists Marie-Therese Schwöllinger, 27, Alexandra Moser, 28, violist Marvin Stark, 24, and cellist Oscar Hagen, 27. The award promotes upcoming string quartets from Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

❷ Japanese violinist **Yuki Hirano**, 19, has won first prize at the inaugural **Vienna Classic Violin Competition** in Vienna, Austria, receiving €20,000. The second prize of €10,000 was awarded to Polish violinist Mariusz Patyra, 46, and the third prize of €5,000 to Chinese violinist Ruifeng Lin, 24.

❸ US double bassist **Paul Sharpe** has been awarded the 2024 University of North Carolina board of governors' **Award for Excellence in Teaching** by the University of North Carolina School of the Arts. He receives $12,500 and a commemorative bronze medallion.

❹ US double bassist **Maxine Gimbel**, 18, has received the International Society of Bassists' ISB 2024 **Jane Little Scholarship** for a female double bassist beginning college as a freshman. The award is worth $10,000. The inaugural ISB **Al Fisher Scholarship Grant** for career development was awarded to US double bassist **Broner McCoy**, 23, who receives $5,000.

FORTHCOMING COMPETITIONS & AWARDS

Vienna International Music Competition in Vienna, Austria, for solo instrumentalists and chamber ensembles aged 6–27. Grand prize €1,000 **Deadline** 30 June; competition 5–10 August **Web** viaf.at

Alberto Lysy International Violin Competition in Gstaad, Switzerland, for violinists aged 28 and under. First prize CHF10,000 **Deadline** 15 July; competition 18–20 October **Web** albertolysy.org/competition.php

International Johannes Brahms Competition in Pörtschach am Wörthersee, Austria, for violinists, violists and chamber groups aged 14 and older. First prize €4,000 **Deadline** 15 July; competition 1–8 September **Web** brahmscompetition.org/en

APPOINTMENTS

- US jazz violinist **Regina Carter** joins the UCLA Herb Alpert School of Music faculty, beginning this year
- The New Zealand Quartet has appointed Australian violinist **Peter Clark** as its new second violin
- The Eastman School of Music has appointed US cellist **Joseph Johnson** and US violinist **David Bowlin** to its string faculty, beginning this autumn
- Canadian violinist **Katie Stillman** will begin her role as the new leader of the UK's Orchestra of Opera North in August

For current vacancies, see our online jobs page at **www.thestrad.com/jobs**

JAVUS QUARTET PHOTO VICTORIA NAZAROVA. GIMBEL PHOTO EILEEN MOLONY

FEATURED PRODUCT

CARBON FIBRE CELLO

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The world's first 3D-printed carbon fibre cello

'I played on a carbon fibre cello for years and was always interested in finding a way to make it sound more like a wooden one,' says Alfred Goodrich, cellist and developer of the Forte3D cello, on the instrument's origins. After much experimentation, Goodrich came up with a hybrid design: top and back plates cut from twill weave carbon fibre; 3D-printed neck, scroll and ribs; and tailpiece, pegs and fingerboard all made from the traditional materials. The parts are assembled by hand, as with wooden cellos, but the full process takes just a day.

The design uses 'entirely different physics' from traditional cellos, says Goodrich. The Forte3D's slightly concave front plate makes use of carbon fibre's high tensile (resistance to being pulled apart) strength. Using the wooden cello's traditional arched design would require the carbon fibre to be significantly thicker to accommodate the stress, but the concave design allows for thinner plates, thereby creating a more resonant sound.

While high-quality sound was the primary goal, the cello's accessibility at an affordable price point has become a defining feature. This is possible owing to the shorter manufacturing time, and the ability of 3D-printing technology to implement design improvements quickly.

And it was the combination of high-quality sound and accessibility that brought Grammy Award-winning cellist Mike Block on board. 'When I first played it I was blown away,' he says. 'It's a game changer, whether it's getting students high-quality instruments or professionals needing a good cello to tour with.' Block tours with it and now helps run the company.

In terms of sound, Block says 'the recurring feedback from other cellists was its playability and responsiveness, with a warm A-string and powerful C-string sound.'

Forte3D Carbon Fibre 3D printed cello £2,447
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SHOULDER REST

MATERIAL GAINS

ArcRest has released alternative species models for its set of wood violin and viola shoulder rests. The new materials are European beech, etimoe, ipê, persimmon and sapele. A foam pad is attached to the rest's Velcro back, which is then secured to the instrument with an elastic band. The customer can choose from five different pad thicknesses.

ArcRest alternative wood rests from $25
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BOW FROG REPLICA

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Arcofrog has released a German bass bow hold version of its double bass tadpoles. The bow frog replica, which is made of hypoallergenic plastic, is designed to help young students with their bow hold training. It features several different embossed patterns to help players understand where to place their fingers correctly.

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Life lessons

Jennifer Koh

The US violinist on the importance of our decisions and promoting inclusivity

I don't think I would be a violinist today if it wasn't for my very first teacher, Jo Davis. When I was around seven years old, she told my parents that she wanted me to study with more advanced teachers and took it upon herself to look for new teachers for me. She chose the teachers she thought would be best for me and drove me to lessons every week (a one-hour drive each way!). She also practised with me every day to make sure I had understood what those teachers had said. The amount of time and effort she invested in me has since profoundly affected my outlook on music and life.

This is similar to the lessons I learnt from violinist Bronisław Huberman's story. One of my dear teachers, Felix Galimir, was saved by Huberman during World War Two. When Felix came to the US as a result, he fundamentally shaped string playing in the country. There is not one major US orchestra that doesn't have players with some sort of link to him. I don't know if Huberman knew that his choice to help would impact generations of musicians and audiences in the US. His action to help save the life of another person would have been significant enough. He, and my teachers, taught me that each decision we make is important – whether through the decisions we make when crafting

Koh performing aged three

TOP PHOTO JÜRGEN FRANK. BOTTOM PHOTO COURTESY JENNIFER KOH

Our mission is larger than ourselves and our careers

programmes, who we mentor, or where we take our points of inspiration, and ultimately how we place the form of classical music in a larger international context.

As musicians, 99 per cent of what we do is about listening. We practise in order to be free of the technical burdens of playing an instrument so that we can spend most of our efforts listening and reacting to others. In life, the art of listening is about empathy and emotional connections. As a result, music can teach us that our lives need to have a mission larger than ourselves and our careers. What matters in the end is what we have done for others. Each choice we make impacts the lives of others.

We must be aware of our choices: are you actively choosing to play a passage on a certain string or play a specific tempo, or are you just doing it because it's been done before? When I return to pieces I have played my entire life, I make sure to have a completely fresh score, so as to not fall into the same habits. I am inspired when I see and listen to artists – from any artistic field – push themselves in new directions and continue to evolve. We need to be careful

not to value our own knowledge over others', because there is always so much we can learn.

My teachers were able to imagine a world that I was a part of. Because of that experience, I realised there's a responsibility for us to keep actualising that presence in classical music, so that everyone can feel invited in this community. And when it comes to fighting for equity, it comes down to putting that time and effort in – just like Mrs Davis and Mr Huberman. Ultimately, it's worth it because we all lose out if we don't hear the perspectives of others.

INTERVIEW BY RITA FERNANDES

RULE OF THUMB

To free up left-hand technique, violinist and teacher **Martin Goldman** encourages players to think more carefully about their thumb as an independent entity, yet still in close partnership with the four fingers

A ten-year-old student surprised me recently by saying: 'Didn't you know the thumb is not a finger?' I smiled, but a quick search on the internet revealed that it is anatomically and functionally different from the other four digits.

I realised that a young pupil's statement supports my opinion that for fundamental set-up, or more subtly in terms of balance, we violinists should pay more attention to our left thumb. I'm sure we've all known how, when experiencing the slightest inkling of worry or questioning, our 'reptilian brain' makes the thumb squeeze.

I've learnt that technique is often a matter of opinion. Simply saying 'think about the thumb' is a pretty vague statement, so here are my thoughts. I begin with the natural posture, palm facing up. Kató Havas called it the 'giving hand' position. That informs us that the thumb should be behind the tip of the first finger. Heifetz pointed that out too. Visualising the thumb as having its own independent existence, I like to touch the neck around the joint line, especially when playing double-stops. Just like when I tell students to check intonation, I tell them to stop and check the thumb. Is it soft, measuring the fingerboard? Does it pivot in high positions, anticipating every move?

In Galamian's book *Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching*, some pictures show the thumb behind the first finger, others higher. This taught me that nothing is static. Every balance point helps avoid counter-pressure. When I'm most comfortable playing, I can feel the 'hollow' space inside my palm, fingers on one side. It's because of the thumb.

With the thumb free to move, it's easier for the fingers to spread, like a Spanish fan opens and closes. Bruno Giuranna used to put a ping-pong ball inside a student's hand, implying the thumb should be slightly bent.

Do you think we hold the fiddle with our thumb? If I play without a shoulder rest, my thumb rushes to give support. I don't believe we hold the instrument with our thumb, like we don't hold the bow with our right thumb. We need it to help feel the centre of the palm, increasing our sense of control. An awakened thumb should self-adjust all over the fingerboard.

Think of the thumb as an anchor, helping the fingers move freely

At a Suzuki workshop one time, I learnt my favourite exercise for greater thumb independence, which has always come in useful. While playing *Perpetual Motion*, move the thumb forward and back with each note. Students hate it, until I hear: 'Wow. My thumb has a brain.' Then, when you practise the pyrotechnics of Dounis and Yost, for example, where is your thumb?

When playing vibrato, I focus on the thumb creating balance: the fulcrum between the swing of the hand and the finger. My goal is to feel how the soft thumb complements the looseness of the vibrato, making it easier to change amplitude and speed.

I remember when I was a kid, shifting made me anxious, even if could internally hear the note I was going to. I imagine the thumb being quietly alive, along with the guiding finger, carrying the hand higher and lower. When you have a sensitive thumb, it frees the hand of tension. I think of it as a weightless anchor, helping the fingers move freely. This awareness helps players who use the thumb in anticipation of a shift; sliding it up or down into the position before moving the hand.

My view is that you must deconstruct the left hand, making the thumb an equal among three: palm, fingers, thumb. Nothing should be arbitrary when you're in the flow of purposeful and deliberate practice. Greater attention to this fifth digit lets us play with more expression and control the subtlest nuance, from *Twinkle* to a Bartók concerto.

AUCTIONS

Like father, like son

An Omobono Stradivari and two Vuillaumes were the standout lots during a varied spring auction season in London, as **Kevin MacDonald** reports

Vuillaume was the maker of I&H's two most important offerings

Going for £420,000 this 1862 Vuillaume cello set a world auction record for the maker at I&H

Spring sales are usually that little bit less grand than autumn ones, and such was the case in 2024. Ingles & Hayday (I&H) offered only 164 lots after withdrawals (down from 307), and Brompton's 257 (down from 270). Only Tarisio, which continues to edge its way back into the London market, increased its offerings to 63. Tarisio also had the belle of the ball this season with the c.1725–30 'Josefowitz' Omobono Stradivari violin selling within estimate for £472,000. This instrument, long held at the Royal Academy of Music, was published in Rattray's *Masterpieces of Italian Violin Making*. It is nearly the last of the loaned David Josefowitz collection, which has been gradually sold by the heirs in recent years. Two other ex-Josefowitz lots were also sold in March at Tarisio: a small-medium (400mm) 1764 Michele Deconet viola at £78,000, and a c.1750 Pietro Antonio Dalla Costa violin, formerly ascribed to Tononi, which made around top estimate at £156,000.

Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume was the maker of I&H's two most important offerings. The first of these was an immaculate cello of 1862, part of a quartet commissioned for the music room of the great violinist and composer Henry Vieuxtemps. The other parts of the quartet have been sold over the years, but this Stradivari model instrument remained with his descendants until now. It went above top estimate selling for £420,000: a new world record for a Vuillaume cello at auction. The other was one of Vuillaume's better 'Messiah' copies, made in 1856 and in clean, virtually unused condition. Indeed, such is its quality that it appeared as a representative instrument in the 2012 Sotheby's Vuillaume exhibition. This spring it made £240,000.

Another I&H lot that merits attention is a c.1690 Francesco Rugeri & Sons violin, previously ascribed to Giacinto Rugeri by Dykes in the 1940s. The instrument was chosen by British virtuoso Albert Sammons for his student Margit Pauson, in whose family it had remained until now. It sold well above estimate for £132,000. Also at I&H, a violin previously identified by the Hills as being by Giovanni Tononi, but recently re-attributed with the aid of dendrochronological work to Gioffredo Cappa c.1700, went within estimate at £96,000.

Brompton's had some major 20th-century Italian violins on the block including a Fagnola and a Rocca, but for interest it would be hard to match a slightly more humble instrument by Marino Capicchioni (of Rimini, 1929). This instrument was awarded to Sergio Scarpa in 1933 when he was a virtuoso music student in Novara. Later years would see him gain greater fame in the post-1943 armistice, pro-Allied Italian partisans, and subsequently as a political leader in the Italian Parliament and Senate. This fine and historic violin sold near top estimate for £38,400.

Another violin of particular interest was a creation of the great John 'Jack' Lott II (see page 97), an artefact of the shadier side of the Victorian violin trade. A composite instrument blushed with Lott's distinctive dark-red varnish, it was passed from dealer to collector to dealer until eventually challenged by the Hills. Its piqued owner then pursued supportive certificates for it as a 'del Gesù' starting with Joseph Chanot of London in 1919 and Chardon & Fils of Paris in 1920. A 2023 dendrochronological evaluation of the front by Peter Ratcliff has given a latest ring date of 1756, thus definitively placing it post 'del Gesù'. The f-holes have been modified, so the belly's actual roots are obscure. Effectively it remains a remarkable product of Jack Lott's art and

VUILLAUME PHOTO COURTESY INGLES & HAYDAY

This violin assembled by 'Jack' Lott fetched £72,000 at Tarisio

Brompton's sold this historic 1929 violin by Marino Capicchioni for £38,400

This early 19th-century bow by François Lupot II went for £25,960 at Tarisio

was sold by Tarisio within estimate for £72,000.

A c.1840–50 cello by 'Jack' Lott's father John Frederick I sold for £42,000 at I&H alongside a c.1800 Thomas Dodd cello with that firm's distinctive varnish at £54,000. Truly, this was a good season for outstanding cellos at I&H, with a Carlo Antonio Testore instrument, previously ascribed to Carlo Giuseppe, going well above top estimate at £144,000.

Also at I&H a Richard Tobin viola was particularly eye-catching. This 389mm alto, which sounded much bigger, is one of the best-preserved and most clearly labelled instruments I have seen by this esteemed maker. Dated 1820, it has a cello-type head and no locating pins. It sold for £16,800. It is worth having a copy of I&H's well-produced catalogue to have a visual record of such reference instruments.

Two other I&H lots that sold quite well, doubling their estimates, were a c.1720 Francesco Gobetti violin at £102,000, and an 1812 Franz Geissenhof violin at £45,600. As previously noted in this column, Geissenhofs – like other fine Austrian instruments – are routinely under-estimated and remain comparative bargains.

Another interesting violin which went over estimate was a composite Antonio and Girolamo Amati violin having an early 18th-century front by another (Cremona?) maker, which sold at Brompton's for £33,040. It was accompanied by an 1893 letter from Hills.

It is said that it only takes two determined bidders to chase a lot up to unexpected heights. However, in the case of a Baroque violin bow made by Luis Emilio Rodriguez Carrington, six Tarisio bidders more than doubled its top estimate to £5,700. Rodriguez Carrington, originally from Mexico, is based in The Hague and produces fine, bespoke period bows. One only rarely sees contemporary Baroque bows at London auction, but those by outstanding modern makers with waiting lists tend to go very well. Other notable violin bows at Tarisio included a c.1860 Pierre Simon (stamped 'Lupot') which sold over estimate at £33,000 and an early 19th-century François Lupot II at £25,960. ●

Geissenhofs are routinely under-estimated and remain comparative bargains

LOTT AND LUPOT PHOTOS COURTESY TARISIO. CAPICCHIONI PHOTO COURTESY BROMPTON'S

A night filled with stars

Laurence Vittes found himself impressed by the talent at the Netherlands Violin Competition in Utrecht, as well as swept away by the diverse array of non-classical styles at its sister Night of the Violin festival

The Netherlands Violin Competition for Dutch nationals concluded its three-week 29th edition on 27 January by awarding Salomé Bonnema the top prize in the Oskar Back Prize category for competitors at the highest level (aged 18–26). The 22-year-old from Leiderdorp gave a performance of the Mendelssohn Concerto in E minor that was serene, elegant and perfectly in sync with the magnificently responsive Residentie Orchestra from The Hague under Jonathan Bloxham. Bonnema lent the music a youthful, soaring ease, paid full attention to the notes and met all the iconic technical challenges of speed and bowing in fresh unhurried ways that were a joy to hear. The audience also played its role, hanging on her every note and cheering warmly at the end.

Central Utrecht

Known for laureates like Janine Jansen, Jaap van Zweden and Liza Ferschtman, the competition has welcomed 122 participants in five age categories, every one of them a Dutch national, and an army of 45 jurors, most of them Dutch as well (the American Tessa Lark being one of the notable exceptions). The fact that the Netherlands Violin Competition is a national contest means that every participant, whether they win or lose, is a home-town hero. As was the case on my last visit in 2020, the atmosphere in the hall was electric.

The youngest of the three Oskar Back Prize finalists,18-year-old Kira van der Woerd, flirted with Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole* brilliantly while battling a heavy cold and took home second prize (having also won the prize for best performance of Mayke Nas's commissioned work, *Unlock Your Full Potential*, in the preliminary rounds). Charismatic 21-year-old Enzo Kok took wonderful chances with his impulsive Mendelssohn, reaching moments of pure genius, and took both the highly coveted audience prize and third prize overall.

The competition's director Aart-Jan van de Pol told me: 'Our national violin competition is very much owned by Dutch violin culture: Dutch violin people, teachers, audiences, players. That helps a lot and gives tremendous energy to the event.'

Wouter Vossen, concertmaster of the Residentie Orchestra and a member of the Storioni Trio, described the competition as 'more a part of the educational system than a career builder like the Sibelius, Indianapolis or Paganini competitions'. He takes pride in 'the courage of the young finalists playing difficult repertoire in front of a big orchestra and a large crowd in a big hall and on the radio, all for the first time'. Distantly related to Adolf Busch, Vossen is himself a part of Dutch violin culture, having been mentored by Herman Krebbers, concertmaster of the Residentie Orchestra in the 1950s and later of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. 'We always kept in good touch,' Vossen said. 'Krebbers gave me all his trio parts with his notes, bowings and fingerings. A tremendous personal gift.'

While the jurors were making their decisions, the stage gave way for a change-of-pace set that turned out to be a sign of a major evolution of the competition in 2024. It was performed by a band called Moon Garden (violinist

OLENA Z/ GETTY

Above Salomé Bonnema's winning performance with the Residentie Orchestra. *Right* Tessa Lark and Tim Kliphuis jam at the Night of the Violin festival

Noah Hassler-Forest, cellist Joshua Herwig and electric guitarist Ella Zirina), winner of the Young Creatives Prize (Jonge Makers Prijs) for non-classical violinist-led ensembles aged 18–26. The band's appearance reflected the competition's commitment to the new and the young which had been evident throughout the main event, notably in the requirement that Oskar Back Prize semi-finalists create a multidisciplinary performance including guest musicians and artists.

The competition's commitment to the future had been showcased the night before when, for almost six hours, a festival for violinists called Night of the Violin had occupied the upper halls and floating performance spaces of the TivoliVredenburg in the centre of Utrecht. During this, nothing much was classical but everything was very violin. Curated by jazz violinist and improvisation guru Tim Kliphuis, the line-up featured Tessa Lark (who at the last minute also subbed for Pekka Kuusisto), Baroque master Shunske Sato, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra deputy concertmaster Tjeerd Top, violinist, singer and composer Diamanda La Berge Dramm, Syrian violinist Anan Al-Kadamani, the Nordic Fiddlers Bloc – and others, mostly on the violin. There was Irish and Romanian folk music, jazz, rock and improv, and a Gypsy trio of violin, piano and cimbalom.

I followed the crowds from one overflowing hall to the next. I heard Tjeerd Top and members of Kamerata Zuid play cowboy tunes and modern jazz takes on Brahms, and La Berge Dramm channelling Tartini into a 21st-century spiral whirl. The most purely magnetic violinist was Al-Kadamani, alongside his lute and percussion ensemble, especially when he was making strangely beautiful sounds using a violin strung and tuned to sound like a cello. Sato joined Kliphuis and an all-star line-up for an extended take on Bach that made no sense at all but was relentlessly, inventively entertaining. I learnt later that the two duelling fiddlers had only met for the first time 15 minutes before going on stage. The Night of the Violin ended well after midnight with all the remaining musicians on stage sent out into the night accompanied by cimbalom riffs from *The Third Man*.

Kliphuis sees the Utrecht event addressing 'one of the major threats to the musical world and to our competition: that there are not enough young artists starting to play the violin'. He told me: 'We are going to invest a lot in turning this around. Last weekend we had 45 kids who had no professional aspirations at all perform at a non-competitive showcase and open podium, not for any prizes – just for feedback and having a good time. And we are investing a lot in helping music teachers around the country.' Kliphuis dreams that 'in ten years' time, all the young kids who performed at the Night of the Violin will have participated in one of these competitions.'

As it turns out, there are even more ambitious plans afoot: in a later announcement made in March, Van de Pol said, 'We found that there are many violinists who would like to participate in both the Oskar Back and the Young Creatives prize. This is good news, for it means that young musicians are embarking on a musical career and investigating different styles at the same time. To offer them the opportunity to compete for both prizes, we have decided to hold the Netherlands Violin Competition plus the Open Podium, the Showcase and the Violin Orchestra, in even years. We will hold the NVC Young Creatives Prize, for ages 18–26, in odd years beginning in 2025. The Night of the Violin Festival will be held every year. And in advance of the 30th awarding of the Oskar Back Prize in 2026, we will start the celebrations in 2025 by inviting ensembles led by violinists, violists, cellists and double bass players to the Young Creatives party.'

I can't think of many, or indeed any, similar competitions to the now independent Young Creatives, or examples of classical competitions that are growing this way. What a fantastic way to diversify.

COMPETITION PHOTO FOPPE SCHUT. NIGHT OF THE VIOLIN PHOTO ERIC VAN NIEUWLAND

LAURA VAN DER HEIJDEN

NEW WAYS OF THINKING

Although British cellist Laura van der Heijden is well versed in live performance and studio recording, she is still discovering new facets of her musical personality, as **Toby Deller** finds out

Laura van der Heijden rehearsing at Kings Place, London

MONIKA S. JAKUBOWSKA

The popular north London café that Laura van der Heijden has suggested as a location for our interview is looking somewhat rough and ready on the day we meet. Evidence of ongoing building work is scattered behind some plastic sheeting, and the ceiling is allowing some of the rainiest spring weather on record to leak into a container on to the table next to us. Its appearance is quite a contrast to her cello playing, which is warm and sympathetic, clear and true. She describes the late 17th-century Rugeri cello she plays (on loan from a private collection) in similar terms: 'One of my favourite parts of it is how warm the lower strings are, which, of course, works wonderfully for chamber music – I think it creates a beautiful bed for other instruments to be on top of. But then it works fantastically for concertos as well.'

As it happens, concertos are the focus of the project with which we begin our conversation: a recording for Chandos with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and Ryan Wigglesworth. Alongside two substantial pieces of 20th-century English Romantic repertoire – Walton's Cello Concerto and Bridge's *Oration* (*Concerto elegiaco*) – it features a cello concerto written specifically for her in 2022 by the British composer Cheryl Frances-Hoad (b.1980).

This was a new experience for van der Heijden, one that shed an unexpected light on her musical personality. 'One of the things I find really interesting about having a piece written for me is that I have all these ideas about who I am as a musician, as a cellist, and I thought that what people might like about my playing would be the lyrical stuff – on my duo CDs, I've recorded a lot of songs because I feel like that suits me. But actually, it's a much more muscular and powerful piece of music than I would have expected. It feels a bit like a mirror is being held up to me: maybe I'm a bit more powerful than I thought. It's incredibly high; it's a really intense piece of music, but it does still have those lyrical lines in it.'

She was first introduced to Frances-Hoad's music some years previously by her teacher Leonid Gorokhov through a short, plaintive piece for solo cello and cello ensemble he had recorded called *Invocation*. So she had long been an admirer of her acutely poetic music. 'Cheryl and I spoke a lot about what the piece might end up looking like. I felt it would be nice to have a nature-inspired piece of music; not so much as climate change propaganda, because I sometimes feel that's not actually that helpful, but more a celebration of the nature that we do have. She got very inspired by swifts and also by volcanoes. The piece's subtitle is *Earth, Sea, Air*, and those are the three movements. There are a few musical things that I love, such as thick brass textures and shimmery strings, and she worked those in as well.'

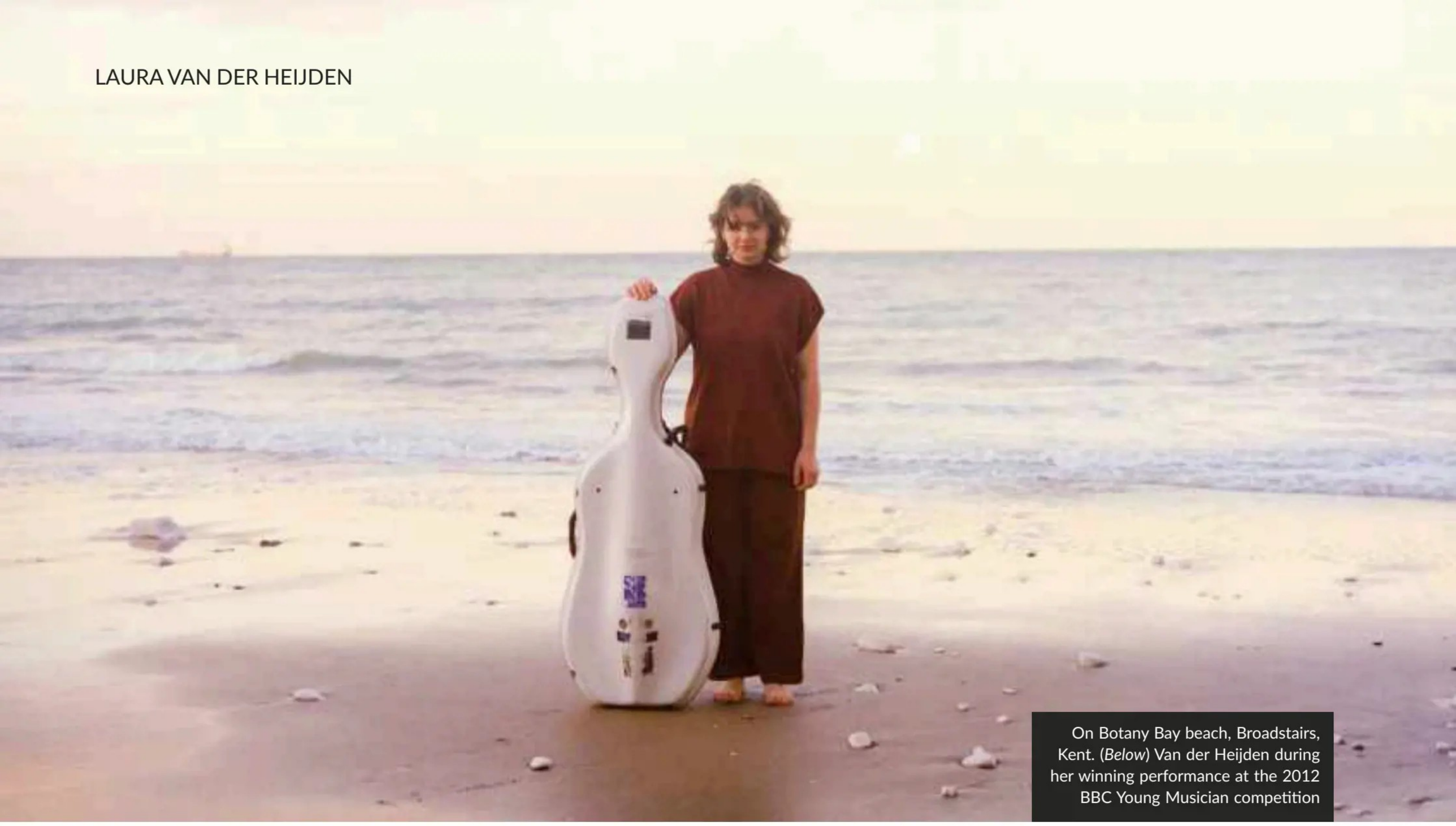
Although it is van der Heijden's first concerto release, she is already a veteran of the recording studio. She is a key member of the Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective, with whom she's made a clutch of recordings; and her personal discography now numbers three duo recitals: her debut of largely Soviet-era music for Champs Hill in 2018 with Petr Limonov entitled *1948*, followed by two albums for Chandos with Jâms Coleman – *Pohádka* (2022) and *Path to the Moon* (2024). 'We are a real duo team,' she says of the more recent partnership, 'dreaming up all of the ideas together.'

The concertos disc is being released on 31 May in time for a performance of the Frances-Hoad at the BBC Proms in July, the world premiere having been given last year in Glasgow. But it has another significance for the cellist, or at least for her audience. The Walton is the piece with which she first came to national attention, winning the BBC Young Musician competition in 2012. She is conscious that people will have been waiting for the recording as a result. It is not, that said, a piece she gets to perform often – one reason why her name is ▹

Van der Heijden with duo partner, pianist Jâms Coleman

MATTHEW JOHNSON

'CHERYL FRANCES-HOAD'S CONCERTO IS A MUCH MORE MUSCULAR AND POWERFUL PIECE THAN I WOULD HAVE EXPECTED'



On Botany Bay beach, Broadstairs, Kent. (*Below*) Van der Heijden during her winning performance at the 2012 BBC Young Musician competition

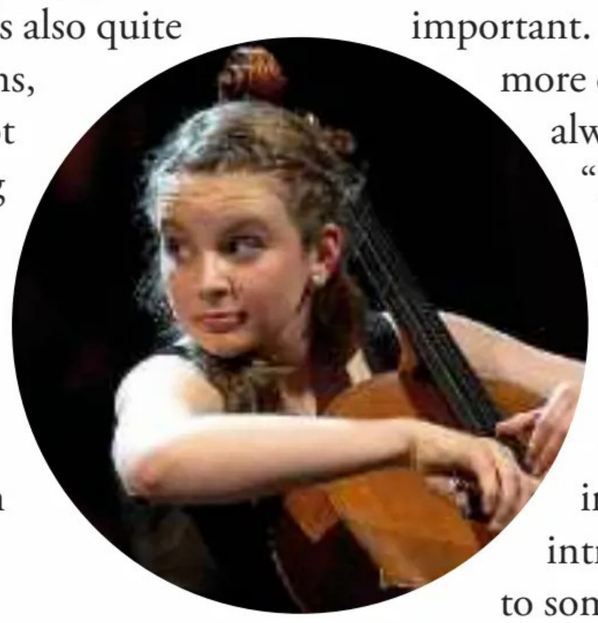
not associated with it as much as it might have been had she recorded it while memories of the competition were fresher. 'I've played it exactly as many times as I've been offered to play it. In fact, sometimes I might have suggested it for a concert and they've said: "No, we want Elgar," or whatever. In choosing that piece for the competition – it was my teacher's suggestion at the time – the idea was not to do something that well known, which also means you don't become as strongly associated with it. And also, I was 15 and it would have had to have been an even bigger stage, or I'd have had to have made different decisions afterwards, for people to say: "Walton – that's Laura."'

Van der Heijden – her mother Swiss, her father Dutch – was born in 1997 and grew up in a village in the East Sussex countryside with a quiet reputation for welcoming alternative ways of living. 'I was talking to a friend of mine recently who said: "You need to remind people that you're a gnome!"' she replies when I ask if the nature of the place has shaped her outlook. 'You know, the classical music world can be quite strict and inflexible sometimes, and you feel the pressures of that. My parents were both hippies and I had a village youth in a big forest. That's where I feel happy and myself. So it has definitely rubbed off on me. It's also quite an unusual village because it has lots of musicians, lots of Dutch people, lots of Germans, so it's not like a typical English village. But the main thing I loved there was the forest; I walked through the forest every day.'

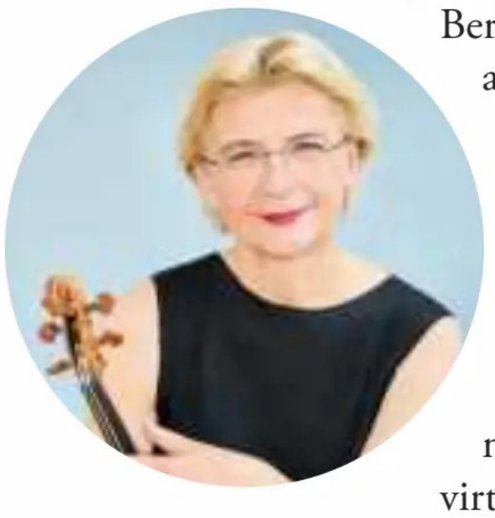
It was there, in Forest Row, that she began cello lessons. 'I started off with a family friend – I visited her just recently – who lived in the village: Marina Logie. She basically had her own technique to teach beginners, which was very wholesome but also a really good foundation.

'THE CLASSICAL MUSIC WORLD CAN BE QUITE STRICT. MY PARENTS WERE BOTH HIPPIES AND I HAD A VILLAGE YOUTH IN A BIG FOREST. THAT'S WHERE I FEEL HAPPY AND MYSELF'

My teacher after her commented on how well I'd been set up. So often you have to undo some work, whereas I really didn't have to.' A couple of years later she joined the Royal College of Music's junior department in London, which is where she began studying with Gorokhov.

'He transformed my playing. He's a teacher who focuses a lot on technique – not for the sake of it, but to give you the tools to say what you want to say. I couldn't have asked for a better teacher. He also has unbelievable ears: he listens for such detail, and he feels that expression and intensity and colour are so important. His feedback was always about the need for more colour, more interest, more intensity. But he always explained how to do it – I never thought: "But how?" I think that's such a common thing: people push you to do more and more, but you think: "Actually, I don't know how to achieve that!" He always explained everything. I don't believe there's anyone who knows more about the instrument than he does. He shows that in his playing: he can play anything. And he introduced me to so many different things and also to some amazing musicians.' ▹

BEACH PHOTO STEPHANE CRAYTON. BBC YOUNG MUSICIAN PHOTO BBC

Much more recently, she has been studying for a master's degree at the Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler in Berlin (she graduates this June), this time with a violinist: Antje Weithaas (*left*). She is not the first cellist Weithaas has taught (Julian Steckel is another), yet the association dates back to an encounter with Weithaas's violinist student Tobias Feldmann in 2012 at the Joseph Joachim competition in Hanover. 'His playing was totally mesmerising in a way that was not showy, not virtuosic, but so honest. I really saw the qualities that I wanted; it felt like there was no wall between what he felt and what came out. It was instantly flowing. That was what introduced me to her as a teacher. I spoke to him about her as well, and he said exactly what I wanted to hear.'



Van der Heijden has enjoyed spending time in Berlin. 'I just love the city – I feel it really suits me. But a lot of my work is in the UK, so it has been a bit of a split and I'm not there as much as I'd like to be. But it has been amazing learning with Weithaas. She was a wonderful next step from my teacher before. People say: "How can you study with a violinist?" But she talks about technique all the time – string playing is string playing, ultimately. Also, she has played with lots of cellists and she knows what good cello playing looks like. Her main thing with me was to try to break down any barriers between my emotional intention and what comes out. On the cello, or any instrument, I think you can end up worrying about how you can make it sound good and you critique yourself at the same time as playing, and sometimes that can get in the way.'

She adds that playing to a non-cellist has helped reinforce the importance of taking repertoire at face value. 'She'll say: "Why are you doing it like that?" Then I think about it and say: "Well, because everyone does – so I don't know why!" She helps bring me back to what's written on the page and to think about it afresh and to make the decision myself, rather than do it like that because that's how it's always done.' This is not just an academic matter for van der Heijden, however, but taps into her practical approach to learning a piece. 'One of my favourite things about rehearsing is trying to figure out how to make things better. I've noticed, especially in pieces where maybe the cello part isn't as involved as others or isn't as hard, that my brain is constantly thinking: "Actually, could this phrase have been like that?" Or, "What can I say to help make it more interesting?" That's the problem-solving part of me. I really love that kind of thing and get most frustrated if I can't find a solution. That's partly my character but also the teaching I've had, which is basically that there is a solution to every problem. Not that there is necessarily a problem, but you can always find ways to improve.'

Somewhat more of an academic matter was her decision to study for an undergraduate degree at the University of Cambridge, where she took music at St John's College, rather than a specialist performance course elsewhere. ▹

TOP PHOTO STEPHANE CRAYTON. WEITHAAS PHOTO KAUPO KIKKAS

'I HAVEN'T REALLY STOPPED TO THINK ABOUT HOW I WANT THE NEXT 50 YEARS TO LOOK. WE ARE IN A TIME WHERE PEOPLE END UP DOING MANY DIFFERENT THINGS. IT'S NOT ONE CAREER FOR LIFE'

'It was quite an intense period,' she reflects. 'Lots of things about it were good for me, but I think it was difficult to be in lots of different worlds at the same time. I feel that if I had my time there again, I would just want to be *there*. I ended up doing most of my concerts in the holidays but probably needed a holiday in the holidays! I felt that I wasn't either doing uni or performing to the best of my abilities – I was just tired. And a lot of people I've spoken to who were there at the same time felt that way as well.

'But I met lots of wonderful people, and maybe it exposed me to a different way of thinking, too. The main inspiration in that whole time was a new course that had been introduced in my third year called "Decolonising the Ear". It was postcolonial theory, and I'd never been introduced to any of that before. It really opened my eyes to many things. There was a lot about the musical canon and how that came about. That is another big part of how I programme things today.'

Her involvement with Kaleidoscope, whose concerts and recordings all give absolute centre stage to under-represented chamber music, feeds into her thinking too. More recently she has begun exploring non-classical idioms, playing with musicians from a variety of traditions, such as cimbalom

With the Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective at Wigmore Hall: (*l-r*) Elena Urioste, Melissa White, Tom Poster, Rosalind Ventris, Laura van der Heijden and Joseph Conyers

player Marcel Comendant, jazz double bassist Misha Mullov-Abbado and tabla player Kuljit Bhamra. Her *Path to the Moon* album (see January's Session Report) includes – among the lunar song transcriptions and the chiaroscuro of sonatas by Walker, Britten and Debussy – a tribute to Nina Simone in the shape of *Everyone's Gone to the Moon*. 'Her version is so powerful because it is so bizarre, in a way. She captures this other-worldly feeling and we couldn't replicate that – there was no way we could be Nina Simone! So we made a decision to try to champion her piano playing, because she wanted to be a classical musician and wasn't able to do that. So it's a tribute to her but not a representation of her. My ideal would have been just to put her recording of it at the end. But of course, we couldn't do that, so it's just an encouragement for people to go and listen to the original version.'

Meanwhile, back on Earth, van der Heijden is about to treat herself to a few months' sabbatical. 'This time last year I ended up getting pneumonia and was in hospital for a while. It was during a month when I was supposed to have time off and also learn lots of rep. Then March was one of the busiest times so I had to play extreme catch-up. It was a really stressful time: I think I had two or three Kaleidoscope recordings, the duo recording was in March, and May was the concerto recording. And there were concerts in between.' The pause will be a chance to take stock as well as replenish herself after a decade of constant progress. 'I haven't really stopped to think about how I want the next 50 years to look. I think that now we are in a time when people end up doing many different things with their lives. It's not one career for life.'

That may not, she reflects, be the typical view of a career in the classical music profession. 'Sometimes when you start out in this world you feel there's only one good path. You feel like the aim is to be a concerto soloist, play in as many places as possible, with big names – all that kind of thing. And also now there's the pressure of social media, and that's constantly shifting. Trying to distance yourself from what you *think* you are supposed to want and trying to figure out what you actually want – that's step one! Step two is actually trying to *do* what you want. You can't just say: "This is what I want," and then magically it happens. I feel that I've entered a period in my life where, in a way, I'm actually examining all that. Classic midlife – no, quarter-life – crisis!' ●

WIGMORE HALL TRUST 2022

RETAIL THERAPY

Saturday morning at Korinthian Violins in Milwaukee, WI, US

As a general rule, luthiers tend to be better at making instruments than making friends. Violin maker **Korinthia A. Klein** gives some hints and tips on good customer relations – both for the people entering the workshop and for those running it

Luthiers, sadly, are not famous for their friendliness or tact when it comes to working with the public. The kind of personality that enjoys tedious work with hand tools and loves hours alone at a workbench is not generally the same type of person who likes engaging with lots of people. I recently had the privilege of speaking at the Violin Society of America's 2023 convention on a topic that doesn't get the kind of attention it should: healthy customer relations in a violin shop.

In this article, I thought it might also be helpful to look from the other perspective and give the clients a guide on how to navigate a violin shop more effectively, since good customer relations really is a two-way street. Let's start by talking about customers, since they outnumber luthiers by a large margin.

A typical violin shop deals with many kinds of customers, including professional musicians, music teachers, students, parents of students, non-musicians shopping on behalf of a player they know, and sometimes just people who want to come in and tell stories about how someone they love once played the cello. This is a wide range of people asking for a luthier's time.

There are also many kinds of violin shops. Some are large, where the luthiers are essentially out of sight and don't have to deal with the public directly. But many are small enough for you to wind up speaking face to face to the person who does the benchwork. In my shop I am alone (with some help from my husband or an occasional assistant), and nearly all the customer interaction is with me.

The first thing for visitors to know is that lutherie is not a 'dying art'. I understand that the average person doesn't know a lot of luthiers but, trust me, there are more violin makers alive today than there have ever been. I know hundreds. But not a month goes by without someone marvelling to me about my 'dying art' and wondering how I stay in business.

Korinthia A. Klein with customer Mark Fulton

I think this is important to note because I get the impression from many people that they can't imagine I'm busy. Most music teachers know better because they see first-hand how many players are out there with instruments needing repairs, and the average musician understands that as well. But I deal with about as many non-musicians as I do players, and because this world is foreign to them, they don't understand what my workload is like. Usually that engenders a sense of wonder when they look around my shop, but at other times, people behave as if I should simply be grateful for their business and expect what they need to be dealt with immediately. But our art isn't dying. Not even close. So be respectful of a luthier's time.

Always assume luthiers are busy and they want to get back to work. That doesn't mean you can't ask questions if you are curious (please do, as we want you to learn), but if a luthier looks like they are trying to lead you to the door, maybe don't launch into another story about grandma and her cello. We like those stories, we really do, but we don't always have time for them on certain days. If we have time for you to elaborate, we'll ask you to tell us more.

Keep in mind that we can get grumpy if we're pulled away from the bench too often. The more time we spend talking to people, the less time we have to do our work. I'm sorry that many luthiers seem rude or impatient and I'm not excusing that behaviour, but please understand that it can be hard for people doing technical work to switch gears quickly into a mode that appears more friendly.

If a luthier works by appointment, please be on time or update them if something has changed. I have to make decisions about how to use my day, and there are some projects I can't start if I know I am going to be interrupted. For instance, if I am rehairing a bow, I can't do the step where I wet the hair ▹

OUR ART ISN'T DYING. NOT EVEN CLOSE. SO BE RESPECTFUL OF A LUTHIER'S TIME

ALL PHOTOS KORINTHIA A. KLEIN

unless I know I can continue to the next few steps in quick succession. If someone is half an hour late for an appointment without informing me, I can't risk beginning that process, and that can greatly disrupt my workflow.

Remember that many luthiers tend to be more attuned to the technical aspects of their craft than the emotional reactions of their clients. We are used to seeing instruments in various levels of deconstruction, and may forget that seeing a beloved violin with its bridge down is distressing to a player. Rather than seeing it as insensitivity, you can view it as evidence that you can have confidence in a luthier who takes such situations in their stride.

Be willing to own up to mistakes. 'It was like that when I opened the case' is a phrase luthiers hear too often, and it doesn't help anything. Embarrassment is understandable when instruments get damaged, but honesty is appreciated. Parents in particular can be over-protective of their children by denying certain behaviours, but in many instances we can see what damage was intentional and what was an accident. Bad behaviour needs to be owned up to and corrected, and accidents can happen to anyone.

Please do not bother luthiers at home, or argue about their hours. That should be obvious, but you would likely be shocked at how often I've dealt with customers who have overstepped certain boundaries. I once had a client call me at home very early on a Sunday morning needing to return a rental cello before they left town, and when I mentioned I'm not in the shop on Sundays, they said not to worry, they were outside my house! I had to scramble to get dressed and meet them at the door. I also had someone get very angry with me about why he couldn't pick something up on a Sunday, and assuming (incorrectly) that I lived in the apartment above the shop, said, 'How hard is it just to come downstairs?' I do make a lot of accommodations for clients, and I'm happy to pick up and drop off bows from fellow players at rehearsals I'm attending and the like, but don't encroach on a luthier's personal space and time unless invited.

If the work a luthier does on your instrument leaves you unhappy, consider giving them the chance to make it right. We're only human and we want you to love your instrument. Don't be afraid to speak up. But as with any customer service, if a shop is not the right fit for you, find another.

I may get in trouble for this one, but in many cases people should take the opinion of their teacher, in terms of repairs, with a grain of salt. Teachers are unfairly put in a position of being assumed to be an expert on instruments, not just on how to play them. I can say from personal experience as someone who majored in music and taught for years before doing repair work, that players and teachers know relatively little about how their instruments are constructed or function. And that's fine! I drive but don't pretend to know much about the mechanics of my car.

There is a lot of information passed down from teacher to student and from player to player that is well-meaning, but incomplete or inaccurate. Please trust when you are in a violin shop that the luthier knows more about what's going on with your instrument than someone not trained in that work. It's not being disloyal to a teacher to go with the advice of a luthier if it differs from the first suggestion you heard.

And lastly, I want to address the fact that the face of lutherie is, thankfully, changing. Not enough, but some. Which means if you expect to see an older white man behind the bench, and instead you find yourself face to face with a person of colour,

IN MANY INSTANCES WE CAN SEE WHAT DAMAGE WAS INTENTIONAL AND WHAT WAS AN ACCIDENT

A number of happy customers at Korinthia A. Klein's shop

Korinthia makes a small adjustment while customers play

or a woman, or a member of the LGBTQ+ community, please pay them the same respect you would to the luthier you were assuming you'd see.

The majority of people who come into my shop accept that I am the expert without issue. But I regularly meet customers who cannot quite get over that I am a woman doing this work, to the point where one man not long ago actually looked over my shoulder at my husband at his computer, and said, 'So, how often do you have to bite your tongue not to interrupt her with your thoughts while she's talking to customers?' To which my husband responded instantly: 'Never. She's the luthier.' I had just spent a long time going over three instruments with this man and he was trusting me to do a lot of work on them, so it was really disheartening to realise that, to him, I still didn't quite make the cut because I was not what he had pictured.

Trust that the shop hired the staff they did for a reason. Don't ask for 'a man' if the luthier trying to help you is a woman. Don't assume a luthier who looks young knows less than one who looks older. Don't assume a person who is black, or gay, or anything you didn't expect, is not the luthier. A whole up-and-coming crop of diverse lutherie students would appreciate it more than you know.

Oh, and always check if we returned your mute if we changed your strings. We unintentionally steal mutes all the time.

Now I want to talk to the luthiers!

Frankly, on the whole, we have earned our reputation for inadequate customer relations. The average customer assumes luthiers to be rude, and we should be embarrassed by that and willing to change.

I understand that the kind of person who enjoys tedious work with hand tools and loves hours alone at a workbench, is not generally the same kind of person who likes engaging with lots of people. I happen to be someone who enjoys both, so maybe I can suggest some better ways to approach customers which will benefit everyone in a violin shop.

Always remember that the average customer feels vulnerable when they step inside your door. You are the expert, and that's intimidating. Some people will challenge you out of insecurity.

Some people are eager to be guided. Try to meet them where they are, in order to help them get what they need. I find if I remember to look at things from the point of view of the customer, and need to make them feel cared for and safe, that goes a long way in helping me choose my words.

Remember to be kind about their instrument, or at least check their amount of sentimental investment in it before speaking your mind.

I ask a lot of questions before I share any opinions. You can speak more freely about a terrible instrument if they found it in an alley on the way to your shop, than if it was handed to them ▹

Korinthian Violins has been operating since 2008

ALL PHOTOS KORINTHIA A. KLEIN

Adjusting a violin peg

by their mother on her deathbed. You might think you are just making basic observations about a violin, but for many people it's like you are criticising their child, so be nice.

Managing people's expectations at the outset helps avoid many problems. When I evaluate an instrument for repairs in front of someone, I note everything down and include a price range for certain repairs, explaining that some things are timed work. But I always caution customers that many instruments are like opening a can of worms, and I don't know what I will find until I can take a closer look on my bench. If I come across something alarming, I will stop and contact them so we can reassess. This is important in case I missed something like a soundpost crack that I didn't notice while I was distracted with talking, and not looking under the best light.

I also ask for a price cap, so if whatever additional things I find can be fixed while staying under that cap, I can have permission to go ahead and fix them without having to stop work until we discuss it.

Ask before you do any retouch if the customer is sentimental about any dings. Every once in a while there is something like scratches grandpa made on a rib in third grade, which mean more to a player than having the varnish look new again.

If something breaks on your watch, you need to make it right. Mistakes happen, and a sincere apology goes a long way. The average customer wants to treat you kindly as well, and they appreciate honesty. I once had a very nice frog simply crumble in my hands when I took out the slide, and I felt awful. I researched options before I called the client, since the frog restoration was outside of my comfort zone. I found someone willing to repair it and told the player I would foot the bill. He was perfectly happy with that solution. It was not my fault, but it happened on my bench, so I had to assume the responsibility. It's frustrating when things like that happen, but imagine the shoe on the other foot and make decisions based on how you would want to be treated if you were in your customer's place.

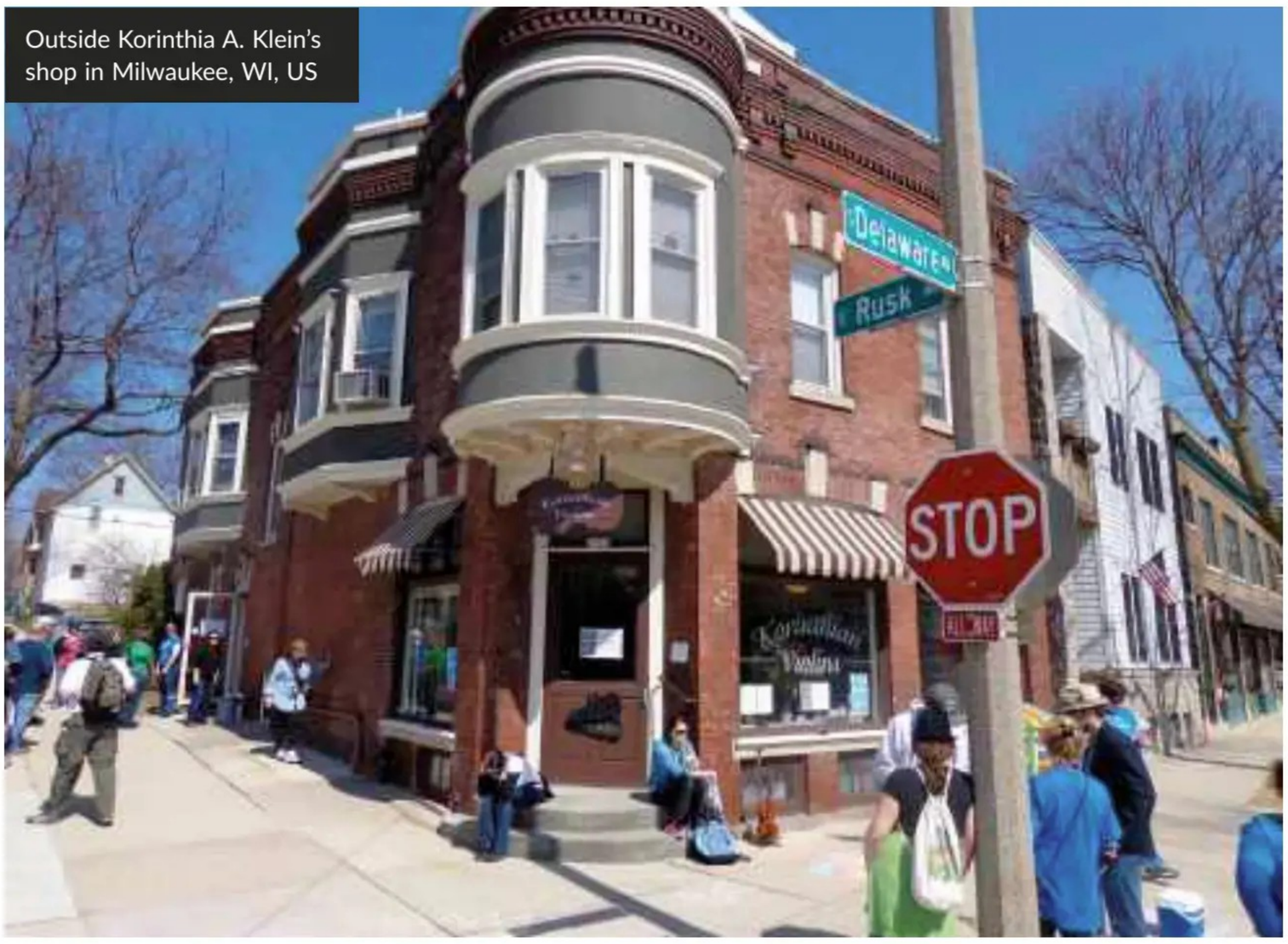
If you simply treat people respectfully, most interactions go fine. But what about when they don't? Our first instinct is to get defensive or take it personally, which makes it about ourselves. Customers need it to be about them. The exception is public reviews. Then you need to make sure what you write is aimed at future customers, not necessarily the specific one with the grievance.

In all cases, you do yourself and your business the greatest service by stopping to figure out how any unpleasant interaction could have been avoided, and create a new policy designed with the prevention of that problem in mind. If someone is angry, you need to hear them out. Most people simply want to be heard.

The best piece of advice I can give for when someone is really upset is to focus on what you can learn from the encounter. If you can find a way to be grateful rather than offended, you're on a better track than if you simply react.

Saying, 'Thank you for pointing out this problem to me. I can't fix what I don't know about,' helps frame things better for both parties and can lead to a real conversation about solutions, rather than staying stuck in an uncomfortable situation. Once people feel heard and appreciated, they can calm down and actually listen. When a tailgut fails, we may see it as a quick fix, and want to explain the technical details. But

MISTAKES HAPPEN, AND A SINCERE APOLOGY GOES A LONG WAY. THE AVERAGE CUSTOMER APPRECIATES HONESTY



Outside Korinthia A. Klein's shop in Milwaukee, WI, US

SHORT-TERM PROFITS CAN'T COMPARE TO THE LONG-TERM VALUE OF A CUSTOMER WHO FEELS TREATED WELL

from the customer's point of view, their violin exploded and it's traumatic. That needs to be acknowledged before you can move on to anything else.

Very few people have actually yelled at me in my shop, but part of that is because I learnt early what to do. It's important to remember that when customers make mistakes they are often embarrassed, and different people deal with that by expressing everything from remorse to anger.

Early on I had an upsetting interaction with a woman who returned a rental viola that her daughter had scratched up pretty badly. I pointed it out (as I usually do, mostly to alert people to bad habits so they can correct them in the future) and she took it as a slight about her child, and possibly her parenting. She screamed at me that I'd sent the instrument out that way. I denied it, which was not what she wanted to hear. The whole thing was unpleasant, but this interaction resulted in our implementing a policy of photographing each renter with their instrument before they take it from the shop. The moment of acknowledgement on both sides that the instrument was in excellent condition when it was put into their care has made a big improvement in how those instruments get treated. I've also never had a repeat argument of 'it was like that when you gave it to me.' We all know I have proof it was not. No more arguments. And because something positive came out of that encounter, I can let it go and not stew over it.

Never say the first thing you're thinking. And if someone writes to you in anger, never reply with the first email or text you write. Put down what you want to say, then leave it alone for a few minutes, delete it and try again. Again, don't get defensive and don't take it personally.

Earlier this year I got an angry email from a new renter. We had missed that the previous person to use the instrument had left a photocopy of their contract – including all their credit card information – in the outer pocket of the case. She was irate and wanted to cease all business with us. After deleting my first response, I thanked her for bringing this our attention, and said that we can't fix what we don't know about. I told her we would do whatever she wanted as soon as she wished, no argument. However, if she would consider letting me earn back her trust, I could assure her that such a thing had never happened before in 15 years of doing business. She decided she'd overreacted, and wanted to keep the violin because her child really liked it. She also suggested we have people take a picture of the contract with their phones rather than make a copy, and that's now what we do. The mistake helped create a better policy.

It's worth the price of a free replacement string, or a new rosin, or a return without judgement, to keep people happy. Short-term profits can't compare to the long-term value of a customer who feels treated well in your shop.

And finally, I always keep chocolate violins (*right*) on hand. Giving someone a chocolate violin goes a long way to brighten their outlook if, say, they had to make an extra trip to your shop because you accidentally stole their mute while changing their strings. ●

ALL PHOTOS KORINTHIA A. KLEIN

‘MUSIC WILL NEVER LET YOU DOWN’

The Henschel Quartet celebrates its 30th anniversary this season. Co-founder and violist Monika Henschel-Schwind speaks to **Andrew Stewart** about the group’s longevity, and looks forward to the premiere of Freda Swain’s neglected ‘Norfolk’ String Quartet at Aldeburgh this summer

(*l-r*) Mathias Beyer-Karlshøj, Daniel Bell, Monika Henschel-Schwind and Christoph Henschel

A labyrinthine philosophical industry has grown up around the analysis of time and our subjective experience of it. The members of the Henschel Quartet could add invaluable insights to the harvest of existentialist literature, illustrated with lessons learnt since they made their first professional bow three decades ago and reflections on how the days since, in the words of the psalmist, have passed as a handbreadth. On 11 June they are set to mark their 30th-anniversary return to the Aldeburgh Festival, where they made their professional debut. For this occasion, they've chosen to pair Beethoven's String Quartet op.18 no.1 and his 'Rasumovsky' op.59 no.3 with the belated world premiere of Freda Swain's 'Norfolk' String Quartet, which will be given a whole century after it was consigned to a drawer by its famously contrary composer. While the Beethoven connects with the programme of the Munich-based quartet's first Aldeburgh outing all those years ago, Swain's score reflects the players' trademark spirit of adventure.

When I speak to the group's co-founder and violist Monika Henschel-Schwind, our conversation lands on the time-shrinking power of memory and the proximity of the past. 'I think it has a lot to do with people; it's not only about recalling things that have happened over time,' she comments. 'It's amazing how shared emotions can take you back all those years. That's why the beginning feels like it happened yesterday. We were so close and everything was so intense.' Those heady early days were preceded by a long gestation period during which three members of the proto-quartet, violinists and twin brothers Christoph and Markus Henschel and their elder sister Monika were joined and left by a procession of cellists.

Close to disbanding their ensemble after a series of false starts and swift departures, the Henschel siblings found their perfect partner in cellist Mathias Beyer-Karlshøj (born in Germany and resident today in Copenhagen and Munich), who instantly clicked with them. The quartet's line-up remained unchanged until 2010, when Markus Henschel left to join the Staatsphilharmonie Nürnberg. His place was taken by Nottingham-born Daniel Bell, an alumnus of Philadelphia's Curtis Institute of Music and former member of the Petersen Quartet, who is currently in his second spell with the Henschel.

Mention of their anniversary outing to Aldeburgh unlocks a flood of happy memories. 'I have goose pimples just talking about it,' says Henschel-Schwind. 'We're so excited about returning to the festival. It's so important to us personally, coming back to where we began all those years ago. It reminds us of the stories that members of the Amadeus Quartet, who were so important to our development and recommended us to the Aldeburgh Festival, told us about working there with Benjamin Britten. I hadn't thought of these things for 30 years, but suddenly they're here again. That's the remarkable thing about how our brains store deep memories.'

Late Beethoven was on the bill for the Henschel Quartet's first visit to Aldeburgh in 1994. Edward Blakeman, then a producer at BBC Radio 3, travelled by motorbike to the Aldeburgh Cinema and was so impressed by what he heard that he handed the Henschel a date at the BBC Proms. The following summer they headed to the Tanglewood Music Festival, where they were coached by violinist Louis Krasner and violist Eugene Lehner. As a member of the Kolisch Quartet, Lehner had taken part in the premieres of works by Bartók, Berg, Schoenberg and Webern, while Krasner had been soloist in the first performances of the violin concertos of Berg and Schoenberg. 'We were the very young quartet-in-residence, and they would tell us about how Bartók wished his music to be performed,' recalls Henschel-Schwind. 'When we speak to our students nowadays, they look at us with big eyes, not quite believing these stories. But yes – they're true! We had the same experience with the Amadeus Quartet's first violinist Norbert Brainin telling us that when he was young he heard an old gentleman talking about how Brahms had wanted a particular work to be played. Just imagine!'

The sense of being heirs to a magnificent tradition of European quartet playing helped motivate the Henschel Quartet during its formative years. It certainly shaped the group's *telos*, the purpose shared by four young people determined to hone their collective skills and use them to fathom the very depths of artistic expression. Their goals were doubtless shared with countless other emerging quartets who, like the Henschel, scored headline-grabbing competition victories, drew critical acclaim and began making recordings. But an early commitment to excellence and a vision of how ▸

'WE'RE SO EXCITED ABOUT RETURNING TO THE ALDEBURGH FESTIVAL. IT'S SO IMPORTANT TO US PERSONALLY, COMING BACK TO WHERE WE BEGAN ALL THOSE YEARS AGO'

PHOTO ©WILDUNDLEISE

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The Henschel Quartet in 1994. (*Below)* The Henschel siblings at the piano in 1972

to achieve it are no guarantors of longevity, as the list of defunct chamber ensembles shows. What has sustained the Henschel Quartet over the years?

'It's the passion that drives us,' Henschel-Schwind replies. 'It's simply impossible not to do it! Music will never let you down. It's always there and takes you to extraordinary dimensions or, when you play, to what I think of as eternal moments. Music puts you in contact with something so much bigger than self – we're so privileged to have this experience.' She laughs when I interrupt to mention the complex psychodynamics of sibling love and rivalry, and the inevitable tensions that arise when any group of musicians strives to realise cogent interpretations of equally complex artworks. The antidote to interpersonal disputes, she suggests, requires building resilience as part of an evolutionary process. It flows above all from a blend of listening and communication that depends on understanding how four pairs of ears work together.

'In the string quartet world, we're aware of our super-skills. Imagine what society would be like if, among all the competing voices, we were able to sense the needs of our neighbours, respond to that skilfully and come together without argument. That's the art of string quartet playing.'

The Henschel Quartet's foundations, which long pre-date the group's Aldeburgh debut, were constructed under ideal conditions. 'It was so natural for Christoph, Markus and me to make music together, as children from a family of musicians,' recalls Henschel-Schwind. The siblings' mother, Marga Scheurich, was a fine harpsichord soloist, while their father, Walter Henschel, was principal violist in the Stuttgart Radio Symphony Orchestra. Their household grew after the Romanian conductor, composer and general force of nature Sergiu Celibidache declared that he was unwilling to stay in a hotel during his visits to Stuttgart as the orchestra's principal conductor; that he, his wife – the formidable artist Ioana Procopie Dumitrescu – and young son wished to lodge in a private house. Knowing that the Henschel home contained ample room for guests, the orchestra engineered a 'temporary' solution to the conductor's housing needs. 'My mother was really surprised when my father announced that Celibidache would be staying with us. We thought he'd be there for two or three weeks, ▹

'MUSIC PUTS YOU IN CONTACT WITH SOMETHING SO MUCH BIGGER THAN SELF – WE ARE SO PRIVILEGED TO HAVE THIS EXPERIENCE'

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MONIKA HENSCHEL-SCHWIND

but he stayed for two years! He was so nice with us children, but he could be a devil in front of orchestras; and when he and Ioana argued, it felt like the house would fall apart! This was part of our upbringing.

'Our parents decided that a string quartet was something really important for us to do, so we started around 1985, when we were in our mid-teens, and they found really good teachers for us.' The siblings and their first cello colleague, Stefan Schütz (now assistant principal cello in Munich's Gärtnerplatz Theatre Orchestra), were introduced to Franz Beyer, professor of viola and chamber music at Munich's Hochschule für Musik und Theater and grandfather of future Henschel Quartet cellist Beyer-Karlshøj. Beyer was about to lead a Munich masterclass in company with the Amadeus Quartet's second violinist Siegmund Nissel and invited the Henschel ensemble to take part.

'That was a great start,' recalls Henschel-Schwind. 'The quartet became such an important part of our lives. Of course, we had no idea that it would last; we were certainly not thinking about becoming a professional string quartet when we were teenagers. But I remember the moment when we three siblings decided that it should be professional. We were in the audience at the Amadeus Summer Course at the Royal Academy of Music in London, listening to the Danish Quartet perform Haydn's "Rider" Quartet. When they'd finished playing, we all thought: "Yes, this has to be it!" We didn't even speak about it; we just knew that that was what we were going to do.'

The Henschel Quartet during its 20th anniversary concert series in 2014

Thanks to the siblings' studies with violinist Felix Andrievsky (*below*) in Tel Aviv and at the Royal College of Music (RCM) in London, they were ready to overcome every technical hurdle in the quartet book. 'He was the centre of our musical lives,' observes Henschel-Schwind. 'The Amadeus players taught us about interpretation, not how to play our instruments. What we learnt about string playing came from Felix. We're so grateful to our parents for introducing us to him.'

Andrievsky was steeped in the wisdom of the Russian violin school, which he had absorbed from his teacher Yuri Yankelevich, who in turn had learnt it from Abram Yampolsky. 'You cannot fail when you're taught in this way. It has an answer to any question about playing the instrument! So when we coach quartets and see someone with a technical difficulty, we will help the player find a way to solve the problem – even though that's not really what chamber music coaching is about.'

The Henschel Quartet's collective technical command and a suite of fine instruments, allied to decades of deep listening, help account for their characteristic tonal richness and exquisite blend. Christoph Henschel plays on the 'Cobbett' Stradivari from 1721; and Daniel Bell plays on a Nicolò Amati violin from c.1650–84, begetter of a bright yet warm sound. Henschel-Schwind, depending on her workload, alternates between two violas: 'My Gasparo da Salò viola is quite large and has an amazing sound. It has a more typical booming C string in comparison with my second viola, by Pietro Guarneri of Venice, which is smaller but also extremely beautiful.

'EVERY DAY WE FEEL A LITTLE MORE AT HOME IN FREDA'S MUSIC AND BECOME EVEN MORE CONVINCED THAT THIS PIECE SHOULD BE PART OF THE MAIN REPERTOIRE'

Norbert Brainin never tired of raving about its sound, which he said was the most beautiful alongside that of his colleague Peter Schidlof's Stradivari viola.'

Beyer-Karlshøj bagged his favourite cello, made in the early 1900s by the Copenhagen firm of Emil Hjorth & Sons, with help from his colleagues. While preparing for a Henschel Quartet concert in Denmark linked to one of their competition victories, he discovered that a Hjorth instrument was for sale at an unbeatable price and that the vendor lived a short drive from where they were rehearsing. Beyer-Karlshøj rushed to her country home and fell in love with the cello only to discover that she had already promised it to another player. He could have it, however, if the original bidder failed to return that day. 'Mathias came back but was really nervous about losing this cello, so we stopped rehearsing and decided to visit the lady,' Henschel-Schwind recalls. 'I think we played the Cavatina from

HENSCHEL PHOTO SUSANNA JUST. ANDRIEVSKY PHOTO ROYAL COLLEGE OF MUSIC

Beethoven's op.130 for her. We were beyond impressed by this cigar-smoking old lady in her little cottage. She was quite a character! Beethoven won her heart and Mathias took his beloved cello home. Although he now also owns another Hjorth plus other cellos, this one remains the "special one" for him.'

With the Henschel Quartet being seasoned champions of unjustly neglected works, it is unsurprising to see a repertoire rarity in their 30th anniversary programme. Yet their choice of composer prompts questions of the 'who' and 'why' variety. Freda Swain appears to have deliberately cultivated obscurity, aided by her belligerent dealings with colleagues and decision to live in isolation in an Oxfordshire wood. Born in Portsmouth in 1902, she excelled as a pianist during childhood and later enrolled at the RCM,

SWAIN PHOTO COURTESY OF TIMON ALTWEGG

Freda Swain at the piano in the early 1970s

where she was among the last of Stanford's composition pupils. Having married her piano professor, Arthur Alexander, and joined him on the RCM's staff in 1924, she attracted attention during the interwar years with works such as *The Harp of Aengus* (1925) for violin and orchestra. Her output of more than 450 compositions, taken up by such luminaries as Scottish violist William Primrose and Danish violinist Henry Holst (a former leader of the Berlin Philharmonic), includes a magnificent Solo Violin Sonata, first performed by May Harrison at Wigmore Hall in 1933, the piano quartet *The Sea* (1938) and the folklike *Song at Evening* (1958) for viola and piano.

Swain's star waned after the Second World War. Although she continued composing almost until her death in 1985, her gender, conservative musical language and retreat to a bungalow on Chinnor Hill all worked against her; her acerbic manner with prospective performers, meanwhile, served to alienate supporters and make enemies within London's music scene. The Henschel Quartet was introduced to Swain by the Swiss pianist Timon Altwegg, whose immersion in her music began during his postgraduate studies at the RCM in the 1990s, after he met one of her former pupils; continued when he acquired eight large boxes of Swain's manuscripts and the rights to her work; and deepened in the process of recording a landmark album of her piano pieces.

'Of course, we'd never heard of Freda before Timon told us about her,' says Henschel-Schwind. Swain's First String Quartet, the 'Norfolk', she adds, caught the Henschel Quartet by surprise. 'We couldn't believe that something of such quality was not part of the repertoire. It's obvious from the errors and other clues in the manuscript that the piece has never been performed, which is even more incredible! We know that Freda didn't care who she offended, but it's so sad that, for whatever reason, her first quartet has remained buried for a century.' The Henschel will crown its anniversary trip to the UK by recording the 'Norfolk' Quartet, aptly enough in the Norfolk village of Old Creake, before returning home to present the work's German premiere on 26 June as part of its own festival in Seligenstadt, a small town near Frankfurt am Main. It is set to give its first performance in Denmark this July at the Herlufsholm International Chamber Music Festival and will introduce the work to Japan when it visits in September.

'Maybe it's fanciful, but for me, Freda's music has mystical qualities,' says Henschel-Schwind. Certain passages in her quartet, she continues, offer strong markers of how they should be interpreted. 'Others are a complete mystery. So we keep trying this, trying that, making many different attempts – some of which seem really convincing, but when we come back to it they don't work. In new works for which they have no reference point in mind, four players will keep changing their individual interpretations and introduce many possible shades of colour, phrasing and expression. Every day we feel a little more at home in Freda's music and become even more convinced that this piece should be part of the main repertoire. It's too early to tell, but my feeling is that in her music there could be greater varieties of future interpretations to win audiences' hearts – greater, even, than with some famous repertoire. Let's hope that there will be many more performances, and that many other string quartets will introduce audiences to their ideas of Freda Swain.' ●

A HOMECOMING

Their latest recording gathers new music and 20th-century works by US composers, but the Miró Quartet musicians are always mindful of melodic accessibility. Harry White hears from cellist Joshua Gindele about the group's commissioning process and recording the album

The musicians of the Miró Quartet know what they like and aren't ashamed to say. 'We champion modern voices; and the notion of melody, of a work being tuneful, is so important to us,' says cellist Joshua Gindele. 'We want audiences to realise that not all contemporary compositions have to be challenging. That they can, in fact, be – for want of a better word – pleasant,' he laughs. 'Or they might use familiar harmonies and language. To learn new music is challenging; it takes a lot of hours. We strive to commission works by composers we know have legs, and that we can keep playing over the course of a season.'

The Miró's latest album for Pentatone, *Home*, is an unapologetic celebration of this value. It features commissions from Caroline Shaw and Kevin Puts in addition to Barber's canonic op.11 and a movement by George Walker. At what point did the quartet – also comprising violinists Daniel Ching and William Fedkenheuer, and violist John Largess – realise its collective admiration for accessibility? 'It became very obvious early on,' explains Gindele. 'When we were younger, we were presented with lots of opportunities to play new works. And often we didn't have that kind of autonomy over who wrote them and what they sounded like. I think we'd spent enough time spinning our wheels learning things that were perfectly good but didn't resonate with us. So, we had very candid and honest conversations about commissioning. But it's important to add that you should take these things I say about lyricism, melody, rhythm and harmony with a grain of salt. For example, a lot of the work that Kevin wrote for us is pretty thorny; it's just that the music doesn't stay in that place the whole time. Ultimately, we'd just had so much experience of playing music that didn't resonate with us that we decided that commissioning would give us a certain amount of control over things: who writes it, where it's played – and so on.'

'IT'S ALWAYS BEEN A GOAL OF OURS THAT WE TRY TO FURTHER THE ART AND HAVE MODERN VOICES BEING HEARD CONSISTENTLY' – *JOSHUA GINDELE, CELLO*

The Miró's clarity of aesthetic is, of course, coupled to its commitment to modernity. 'I think we must have commissioned one work, maybe two, per season for our whole career, since we started thirty years ago,' says Gindele. 'And the inspiration actually came from studying with the Juilliard Quartet, who added such a rich body of works to the canon that still exist. They even presented the first ever public cycle of Bartók's quartets. It's pretty wild the kind of people they worked with and the pieces they were able to add! Sure, we have an incredible repertoire as a string quartet; it's endless, really. And there's a ton even in the standard canon that we haven't played. But it's always been a goal of ours that we try to further the art and have modern voices being heard consistently.'

Back to the album, and of Shaw's *Microfictions* vol.1 and Puts's *Home* Gindele explains, 'Both were works we had initially commissioned to tour with. As we travelled with them, we were also playing the Walker and the Barber, and we realised that each of these composers was not only American but also had won a Pulitzer Prize! That conscious recognition was really how the idea for the album came about. There were interesting juxtapositions within the concept, too. Shaw was very young when she won, whereas George Walker, who was the first African-American composer ever to win a Pulitzer Prize, didn't win it until he was in his seventies. Also, looking at American music over the course of a hundred or so years and celebrating this journey – this was interesting for us.'

JEFF WILSON

Of course, the four works are also connected by the thread of honouring melodicism. 'When we commission composers, we do so because they usually have a keen sense of melody and weave something that touches us,' says Gindele. 'It's mostly not very austere writing; we tend not to dig into the more thorny classical composers that maybe other quartets do! So, these works are linked by their wonderful melodic quality, although there is obviously tremendous diversity of expression here, too.'

Given the vast quantity of new works the Miró engages in, there is presumably quite a process now for commissioning. 'Oh, for sure. It's very strategic,' agrees Gindele. 'Now that we're a little more established and older, we mostly commission composers with whom we already have a personal relationship and who've shared with us a musical experience of some kind. We have a list; a consistent commissioning plan for many years to come, actually. We have funding, composers selected; we know what they're doing. In fact, we've come to a different methodology from that which we practised in the past. Now, we put together consortiums of commissioners who co-commission works on our behalf.'

He continues: 'What we love about this is that the pieces have longevity. For example, if you have one festival that is willing to commission a work for you and you play it at that festival, then the music doesn't necessarily have a life beyond that; whereas if you have six or eight different concert promoters who each pitch in a sum of money to commission a work, then you play that piece six or eight times. The added advantage is that you get to know a work much better when you perform it more frequently, and the piece generally has a life after that, too. It adds to the value of the rehearsal hours you've spent getting to know a new work.'

Fittingly, and in a departure from their usual practice, the Miró musicians made the decision to record *Home* in their home town of Austin, Texas. 'We actually decided to do the project at our classical radio station, KMFA,' says Gindele. 'They have this wonderful performance space. It's not huge, but because of our relationship with them, which is really solid, they were very generous with letting us rent it. Ultimately, we returned home as it was convenient for how our lives were at that time, but the space was also appropriate for what we were doing.

'Often, we've gone for quite large venues. Most of the Beethoven collection, for example, was recorded in a chapel that could seat about 800 people. KMFA seats about 150–200, which was a bit of a new experience for us. But the fact that it was smaller brought a little more clarity to the playing, which I think for contemporary American music is nice. You can tell when you listen to it that the space is more intimate. And honestly, for me, the convenience of it being local, of sleeping in my own bed and seeing my children, made it worth taking that risk with this album because it made the whole recording environment so much more pleasant.'

This album is surely something of a homecoming for the Miró, both geographically and aesthetically. But 'home' is as much about people as it is about place and feeling. 'Indeed,' says Gindele, 'and we had the same engineer that we used for our Beethoven cycle and all of our Schubert recordings – Da-Hong Seetoo – who, perhaps most famously, recorded a lot of the Emerson Quartet's albums. He's both produced and engineered this record and is someone we trust. He was a violin prodigy, studied at the Curtis Institute and has the most incredible ear. But he's also very technically driven. Every time we work with him we know that we can just play; we never have to police ourselves, because he's so sharp and his ear is so good that we know that if something doesn't sound so good, or if there's a bowing, fingering or slide that's not working, he's going to hear it. It puts us at ease, really; recording with him is just so simple.'

What does the quartet hope listeners will gain from the experience of this record? 'All of these composers have their own voice in a very sincere and honest way,' Gindele says. 'But they are also all works that resonate with us. I feel that a really good collaboration between composer and performing artist is one where the voices of both are heard. Ultimately, we really hope that that's what is communicated here.'

The Miró Quartet (*l–r*): Daniel Ching, Joshua Gindele, William Fedkenheuer and John Largess

KENNY CHEUNG

WORKS **Barber** String Quartet in B minor op.11
Puts Home **Shaw** Microfictions vol.1
Walker Molto adagio (String Quartet no.1)
Arlen Over the Rainbow (arr. Ryden)
ARTISTS **Miró Quartet**
RECORDING VENUE **KMFA, Austin, TX, US**
RECORDING DATES **January 2023**
LABEL **Pentatone PTC5187227**
RELEASE DATE **10 May 2024**

Trio Gaspard: Jonian Ilias Kadesha, Vashti Hunter and Nicholas Rimmer

ANDREJ GRILC

THREE'S COMPANY

Are piano trios having a sudden renaissance? **Charlotte Gardner** hears from industry professionals and from musicians who relish the repertoire offered by this flexible but underrated chamber grouping

Was ever a chamber genre simultaneously so beloved, so problematic and, in fact, so abounding in contradictions as the piano trio? Piano, violin and cello: three entirely contrasting tones, registers and volumes, and a dynamic requiring players to act as both personality-rich soloists and self-negating chamber players. There's enough music to last an ensemble a lifetime, but a comparatively small complement of audience-pulling core repertoire. It's an overall package that's rich and fulfilling enough to devote an entire career to, but one that historically has spawned but few permanent, truly full-time and enduring ensembles with an international reach – the Beaux Arts Trio and Trio Wanderer being notable exceptions.

Yet suddenly it feels as though piano trios are everywhere. Within the middle generation, more are lasting the distance and rising in profile, albeit within a portfolio rather than a full-time career – key examples being the Gaspard and Sitkovetsky, the latter's 2024 season including a Vienna Konzerthaus debut, returns to the Hamburg Elbphilharmonie and London's Wigmore Hall, and the release of the third instalment of its Beethoven recording cycle for BIS. Looking to the younger generation, the past decade has seen a veritable explosion of piano trios winning competitions, receiving scholarships and residencies, mastering social media and being taken on by young artist schemes, with names including the Amatis, Amelio, Astatine, Bohémo, Chagall, Consonance, Ernest, E.T.A., Hélios, Karenine, Messiaen, Hel, Orelon, Paddington, Pantoum, Sōra and Zadig trios. Some of these new-generation trios exist as key elements of portfolio careers. Others, however, are full-time pursuits, with their members' ambitions to keep progressing on that path.

What makes this doubly fascinating is that the problems traditionally faced by permanent piano trios haven't gone away. Concert and festival programmes, record label catalogues and management rosters still suggest that trios aren't getting as big a bite of the cherry as quartets. Another practical issue also remains – that many of the smaller promoters and concert societies who love young artists don't own a piano, let alone a decent one. Even more difficult is that piano trios aren't even only competing with fellow established trios; being less blend-dependent, a piano trio can achieve excellence in fewer hours of work than can a quartet, and that means that not only do many festivals prefer to form their own ad hoc artist combinations, but promoters are generally more often after the box-office appeal of a celebrity trio, whether it's a brand new constellation or made up of regular collaborators such as Leonidas Kavakos, Yo-Yo Ma and Emanuel Ax.

The Beaux Arts Trio in 1978 (*l–r*) Isidore Cohen, Menahem Pressler, Bernard Greenhouse

In other ways, though, the landscape has shifted. One driving factor being cited for the surge is the number of highly skilled pianists now around, many of whom are eschewing the competition circuit, or actively choosing a chamber career over a solo one. Likewise, never has there been such a high volume of exceptional string talent emerging from conservatoires and going into an already crowded market. In conservatoires themselves, chamber music is being promoted more and earlier, and ▹

The Kavakos, Ax and Ma supergroup

BEAUX ARTS PHOTO NOORD-HOLLANDS ARCHIVE. AX KAVAKOS MA PHOTO MARK ALLAN

The Sitkovetsky Trio (*l-r*) Alexander Sitkovetsky, Wu Qian and Isang Enders

there's less of a division between a soloist's track and that of an ensemble, and a greater emphasis on portfolio careers. As Young Classical Artists Trust (YCat) CEO and artistic director Alasdair Tait puts it, having witnessed this trend himself: 'There are more and more amazing musicians out there who see the piano trio as just another option.'

Furthermore, while the youngest trios tend not to have management, neither that nor the lack of a high-profile champion is the handicap that it used to be, because social media has handed everyone the tools to own their visibility and profile.

Career springboards are also more numerous now. Competitions, for instance, are an area cited by violinist Alexander Sitkovetsky as having thoroughly changed since he founded the Sitkovetsky Trio in 2007 with pianist Wu Qian and cellist Leonard Elschenbroich (the current cellist, since 2017, is Isang Enders). 'We were thinking about doing a competition or two in 2008, but we couldn't find a single one that year apart from the International Commerzbank Chamber Music Award that had just started in Frankfurt' – which they won. 'Somehow, in the last couple of years the number of competitions on the CVs of piano trios has risen,' he says. Indeed, there are now more piano trio competitions to apply for than ever before, which

'THERE ARE MORE AND MORE AMAZING MUSICIANS OUT THERE WHO SEE THE PIANO TRIO AS JUST ANOTHER OPTION' – *ALASDAIR TAIT, YCAT CEO*

THREE TO WATCH: MITHRAS TRIO

Violinist Ionel Manciu, cellist Leo Popplewell and pianist Dominic Degavino formed the Mithras Trio in 2017 at London's Guildhall School of Music and Drama when their respective teachers' hunch that they'd work well together turned out to be correct. The ensemble's long list of awards and achievements includes first prize at Trondheim (2019), a place on the BBC New Generation Artists scheme (2021–3) and this year a Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award. Its debut recording, *Eros*, was released last year on Linn, its vibrant readings of Bridge, Erőd, Ginastera and Helen Grime demonstrating why the trio is turning so many heads.

For all three musicians, the trio these days is an important and steadily strengthening part of a portfolio career (featuring orchestral jobs for Manciu and Popplewell, and other chamber playing for Degavino), essentially because, as they put it, 'There doesn't appear to be enough work to sustain a full-time career as one thing.' They come together on a project basis, which, this far into the trio's life, works well. 'We've come to know what each of us thinks about certain things,' says Degavino. 'It doesn't take long to form a cohesive Mithras sound on a new piece.' They also enthuse over how their outside work enhances their trio playing. 'Our rehearsing and performing have really changed over the years,' says Manciu. 'There's all that breadth of knowledge and experience, and the ability to have an overview on music and music making.'

They relish barely plundered repertoire, especially that of the 20th century (by composers such as Babadjanian and Erőd), which they savvily juxtapose with audience-pulling biggies. Right now, they're pairing Tailleferre and Saint-Saëns with the Beethoven 'Archduke'. As Manciu points out, 'Many pieces may not be well known now, but they're very good. So with more people playing them, because there are now more piano trios, perhaps in 20 years they will have become staples.'

SITKOVETSKY PHOTO VINCY NG

has gone some way towards mitigating the fact that the major 'ones to win' – ARD, Melbourne, Osaka, Trieste and Trondheim – only take place every few years (an exception being the annual Royal Over-Seas League contest). Especially in the last decade or so, further international options have arrived on the scene, such as the Lyon International Chamber Music Competition (introduced in 2004), the Cavatina Intercollegiate Chamber Music Competition (London, 2012), the Schoenfeld International String Competition (Harbin, China, 2013), the Birmingham International Piano Chamber Music Competition (2018) and, most recently, the Ilmari Hannikainen Piano Chamber Music Competition (Jyväskylä, Finland, 2023).

Then there are the ever-expanding remits of young artist schemes and foundations. The especially high ratio of piano trios in Europe is partly attributable to ProQuartet and the Fondation Singer-Polignac, both in Paris, and the Vienna-based European Chamber Music Academy (ECMA). And while these do not guarantee a subsequent sustained career ('They've become a rite of passage,' cautions Tait, 'but the question is, what happens to these ensembles afterwards?'), they're certainly a boost to those trios with the talent and intelligence to harness all they can offer. Take Trio Hélios, established ▹

Trio Hélios (*l–r*) Alexis Gournel, Eva Zavaro, Raphaël Jouan

THREE TO WATCH: TRIO ORELON

Violinist Judith Stapf, cellist Arnau Rovira i Bascompte and pianist Marco Sanna formed Trio Orelon in 2019 at the music universities of Cologne and Berlin, thanks to Stapf and Rovira i Bascompte already playing in duos with Sanna, who had dropped soloist activities in favour of chamber playing and saw the piano trio as 'the pinnacle of what the world of chamber music offers'.

HÉLIOS PHOTO LYODOH KANEKO. ORELON PHOTO SERGIO BERTANI

The group's awards in 2023 included first and audience prizes at the ARD International Music Competition and first prize and trio commission prize at the Melbourne International Chamber Music Competition. In 2022 it also won two awards, including the first prize, in the Franz Schubert und die Musik der Moderne chamber music competition, Graz. That same year saw the release of a CD of Beach trios on the Da Vinci label. A second release, featuring more female composers, comes out later this year. Signed to an agent and operating full-time, the trio has a packed schedule, including forthcoming debuts at Vienna Musikverein and Berlin Boulezsaal.

As for how all this has been possible, the two keywords are Covid and competitions. 'All our generation's trios experienced the pandemic in their earliest time together,' says Sanna. 'For us, this was a positive thing because it gave us what musicians don't usually have: time – to rehearse, work on our sound, enjoy being in each other's company.' Competitions then gave them visibility, concerts and a degree of financial help, 'even if they're not the best paid in comparison with the solo ones', adds Stapf. 'It was also through the intensity of this competition period that we figured out that being together 24/7 was something we wanted.'

As for the future, they're both hopeful and pragmatic. 'We know that ten years ago young trios could not be full-time,' says Rovira i Bascompte. 'Our goal over the next few years will be to enjoy this time and to use the concerts we have – both the more and the less important ones – to build a network. Then we will see.'

in 2014. Formerly of the ECMA and currently resident at the Fondation Singer-Polignac, it also has a string of competition prizes (including second prize in the Trondheim International Chamber Music Competition) and the championing of René Martin, co-founder of important French festivals such as La Folle Journée and the international piano festival of La Roque d'Anthéron as well as the record label Mirare, on which the group has so far released two albums.

For those who do make life in a piano trio work, its musical joys go far beyond the practical and individualistic ones – and it's unique. 'If you look at the string quartet over its 250 or so years,' says Sitkovetsky, 'it doesn't change that much in terms of the *prima* first violin and the cello as bass, even if the middle voices become more complex as we get later. Piano trio writing changes much more. And it's just such a combination! Everyone gets their individual go, but also they combine to play as a real unit.'

Sitkovetsky would also challenge any generalising over there being less of a need to blend. 'If you look at Tchaikovsky, Mendelssohn, Brahms especially, there's lots of unison playing, and when it's that unified string sound, it is so important to blend. I've had two cellists with very strong musical personalities to play with, and I love having a really strong, rich cello sound with which I can blend my soprano.'

While the piano trio repertoire is made up of a smaller body of famed masterpieces, major composers are still well represented, with forty-five from Haydn; eleven from Beethoven; six from Mozart; four from Dvořák; three each from Brahms and Schumann; two each from Schubert, Mendelssohn and Shostakovich; and a major masterpiece from both Tchaikovsky and Ravel. Also, says Tait, there's a further core repertoire in which a piano trio sits as the nucleus: 'One of the trio's strengths is the real opportunity for interesting additional-people projects such as the "Trout" Quintet.' Also, don't forget the lesser-known trios by other big names: Copland, Debussy, Fauré, Franck, Korngold, Saint-Saëns, Smetana and Richard Strauss.

Thanks to the piano trio's place within domestic music making from the late 18th century through to 1900, there is also an extensive body of more obscure repertoire – which in today's saturated market is suddenly more of a boon than a handicap. Add to that the way that historical female composers could really shine in the domestic music market, and it's even more perfect for the current zeitgeist. Sitkovetsky singles out Chaminade's Second Trio as being particularly beautiful. Almost as good, he thinks, are the two by trail-blazing Swedish organist–composer

THREE TO WATCH: TRIO CHAGALL

YCat artist Trio Chagall was formed in 2013, when violinist Edoardo Grieco, cellist Francesco Massimino and pianist Lorenzo Nguyen were in their mid-teens studying in Turin. Possessing a distinctive, beautifully elegant sound, this ensemble has had a steady stream of success including winning several prizes (including the top one) at the 2019 Premio Trio di Trieste competition and first prize at the 2023 Schoenfeld International String Competition; and holding two residencies – at ProQuartet (2023–5) and the ECMA (2021–3).

'We initially started purely for enjoyment,' says Massimino, 'and we were very lucky with our tutors, because in Turin both Edoardo and Lorenzo had teachers who were in piano trios, and then I went to the Stauffer Academy in Cremona and was taught by Antonio Meneses of the Beaux Arts Trio. Competitions have given us work and visibility. ECMA and ProQuartet have been very important, enabling us to share abroad what we have learnt, while still learning. YCat supports us not just on the concert side but because we always have someone to talk to about an idea. We now live in Basel, which is a really fantastic environment. Beyond that, it's about trying to have the clearest idea of the people we want to be, the musicians we want to be, and what we want to share with the audience. We are still in the process, but we are now in a position to imagine this as our future full-time job.'

Repertoire-wise, one focus is the music of their homeland. 'There are not so many piano trios from Italy compared with France or Germany,' points out Nguyen, 'so we're interested in promoting Italian works past and present alongside the well-known greats.'

FEDERICO CARDAMONE

The Neave Trio (*l–r*) Anna Williams, Eri Nakamura and Mikhail Veselov

Elfrida Andrée (1841–1929). He also advises looking beyond the 'favourites' within the core composers' outputs: 'The Mendelssohn Second Piano Trio in C minor is unbelievable – so perfectly written, but also so emotional, so warm.'

Not all record label directors are shy of piano trios, either. Take Ralph Couzens of Chandos Records, whose stable of artists includes Trio Gaspard, currently engaged in both a city-themed series and a combined commissioning project and Haydn cycle; and the Neave Trio, presently recording all sorts of under-represented gems by historical female composers. 'Whatever the instruments are,' says Couzens, 'who I choose to record with is driven by repertoire, together with the quality of playing and that extra indefinable spark. And the piano trio sound world has always interested me. It's one that's a challenge to record with the right balance, because the cello tends to get submerged by the piano. But when you do get it right, with the clarity through all the lines, it's wonderful.'

As for how to go about founding a successful piano trio, for Tait it's about not putting the cart before the horse. 'Groups form because people have enjoyed playing together and something starts to emerge,' he says. 'The minute they become a vehicle to getting a career or following a career path that isn't necessarily there, there's the risk of putting a lot of energy into something that will lead to disappointment and frustration. Everything should revolve around what fulfils you personally, and your growth as a musician – and then you see what opportunities can come from it.'

Whether it will ultimately be possible for the new generation of trios to build genuine full-time careers, time will tell. But even if not, the portfolio model as described by Sitkovetsky couldn't sound richer: 'The trio is very much at the forefront of our careers and not treated as a side dish. But we also all have other exciting projects – concertos, playing–directing, chamber music outside the trio; and as good as we are about inspiring ourselves within the group, it's useful for us to be able to bring things in from outside. What I love is that the three of us have managed to find an equilibrium where we don't have to place one project above another.' ●

'THE TRIO IS VERY MUCH AT THE FOREFRONT OF OUR CAREERS AND NOT TREATED AS A SIDE DISH' – *ALEXANDER SITKOVETSKY, VIOLIN, SITKOVETSKY TRIO*

JACOB LEWIS LOVENDAHL

LISTEN TO THE INNER VOICE

Measurement set-up in the corner of the author's research space

Normally, acoustic measurements are taken from outside the instrument – but the internal vibrations can reveal even more. **Colin Gough** presents a method for listening inside the soundbox and demonstrates what it can tell us about the sound

In this article we describe how the acoustic characteristics of any hollow-bodied stringed instrument can be investigated by simply tapping the bridge with a very light hammer, and measuring the sound radiated inside, rather than outside, its hollow body.

The inner cavities of the violin, viola, cello and double bass provide their own, reproducible, micro concert hall or recording studio, which travels around with the instrument itself. In addition, for any given class of instrument, the cavities are very similar in size and shape. The acoustic characteristics and differences between instruments can therefore be measured in a well-defined acoustic environment, avoiding the usual complications from the resonant acoustics of the surrounding space.

In addition to being a potentially valuable workshop facility, internal cavity sound measurements provide a way of measuring the intrinsic acoustic properties of an instrument. This includes the coupling of the vibrating plates to the internal cavity air modes, which is directly

ALL PHOTOS AND IMAGES COLIN GOUGH

related to the excitation of radiated sound. We also describe a low-cost, high-performance facility for making such measurements. A computer and freely downloadable software can then be used to record, identify and display the acoustic characteristics of hollow-bodied instruments of any size – effectively determining the quality of the sound both outside and inside the cavity.

MEASUREMENT SET-UP

For our measurements we use a pair of sub-miniature, omni-directional, electret microphones, with a useful frequency response extending to around 10kHz. We modify one microphone to record the frequency-dependent spectrum of the energy transferred to the instrument by the hammer tap, while the second measures the sound radiated inside the hollow cavity by the excited vibrations of the body shell.

The microphones are mass-produced in China, probably in their millions, for audio device applications, and cost less than a cup of coffee. They are simple two-terminal condenser microphones, using a permanently polarised dielectric to charge the internal diaphragm responding to the sound pressure. They also incorporate an internal amplifier, requiring a small external biasing current, which together provides the stereo hammer and microphone voltage line-inputs to an inexpensive, constant-gain Behringer UCA202 stereo audio unit.

The audio unit is USB-connected to a laptop or computer with freely downloadable computer software used to record, process, store and display the intensity of the sound of an instrument at its acoustic centre, plotted as a function of excitation frequency derived from the hammer tap on the bridge.

MEASUREMENTS

Figure 1 shows the very simple compact experimental set-up, with the 5mm-diameter internal microphone removed from inside the cavity to illustrate its mounting. The microphone is attached to the end of a plastic cable tie, bent into a shape that can be passed through the f-holes without touching the inner edge of the central island area. This can then be supported externally, or temporarily fixed with a temporary adhesive like Blu-Tack to the outside edges of the instrument waist, with no damage to the instrument and scarcely any influence on the measured characteristics.

For quick and easy, routine, reproducible internal cavity measurements, we insert the microphone centrally through the f-holes, just a few millimetres in front of the bridge, opposite the f-hole notches, close to the acoustic centre of the cavity. For our purposes, the acoustic centre is defined as the node (zero acoustic pressure) of the A1 internal air mode, with air bouncing backwards and forwards along the length of the cavity. Moving the microphone a few millimetres to either side of the acoustic centre reveals a rather narrow resonance from this mode at around 480Hz, usually located between the strongly radiating B1- and B1+ modes. However, in contrast to the strong radiating A0 f-hole air resonance just below 300Hz, the A1 is acoustically unimportant; it cannot radiate strongly, as its amplitude is close to zero at the f-hole notches. The height between the top and back plates is not critical as, below around 3kHz for the violin, both the vibrational modes of the plates and the air inside the cavity are effectively two-dimensional.

FIGURE 1 Close-up of the measurement set-up, with the 5mm-diameter internal microphone removed from inside the cavity,

We then attach a second 10mm-diameter microphone to the end of a similar cable tie, to form a hand-held, pendulum supported, or flexural beam-mounted hammer, with the latter version illustrated above. This is used to tap the top bass-side corner of the bridge gently. This microphone is converted into an accelerometer instead of a microphone by forming a shallow hemispherical endcap, made from epoxy resin, over its front face. This stops sound from entering the device and forms the soft head of the hammer used to tap the bridge.

The acceleration of the hammer head as it bounces on and off the bridge now deflects the edge-supported recording internal diaphragm, in just the same way that sound pressure would otherwise have done. The acceleration of the hammer head measured over the very short time it takes to bounce on and off the bridge (only a few hundred microseconds), multiplied by its mass, then determines the total amount of energy transferred to the violin by the single tap as a function of frequency. A significant fraction of this energy excites the plate vibrations, which radiate sound equally outwards and inwards into the cavity, which is what we measure.

An easy-to-make 'dongle' between the outputs of the two electret devices and a Behringer UCA202 stereo amplifier unit provides the biasing current for the two devices, while two capacitors decouple the audio signals from the associated DC voltages across the devices. The Behringer amplifier is USB-connected to a laptop or dedicated older computer.

The software in the attached laptop or computer then does all the necessary analysis and processing of the stereo signals, ▹

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from the short hammer tap and much longer ringing sound inside the cavity (a significant fraction of a second), to produce an acoustic spectrum for the instrument. This is what we will be plotting for all four instruments of the violin family in the following sections.

Details on how to set up your own measurement system are described in the Trade Secrets section of this issue. Additional information can also be downloaded at bit.ly/4b7WDii along with several related publications and notes for further guidance. The software used in the following examples was developed specifically for use by luthiers by George Stoppani, the Manchester-based luthier, gut string maker, historian of stringed instruments, acoustician and software expert. A slightly more user-friendly, freely downloadable version using standard commercial software, along with detailed guidance on its use, has recently been developed by Chris Rogers, professor of engineering at Tufts University in Boston, MA, US, who has a strong interest in violin acoustics.

We now illustrate typical internal cavity measurements for all four instruments of the violin family to demonstrate their value, validity and versatility.

THE VIOLIN

Our first example (**figure 2**) shows a superposition of internal cavity sound measurements for a fine-sounding 2011 'tonally informed' copy of the 1715 'Titian' Stradivari by George Stoppani, first with damped (blue) and then undamped (red) strings. The measurements are plotted up to around 700Hz. Both plots show the familiar B0, A0, CBR, B1- and B1+ signature mode resonances, observed in radiation measurements on almost all high-quality violins. The characteristics are very similar to those published in many previous articles in *The Strad*. For well-understood acoustic reasons, the amplitude of the A0 mode resonance relative to those of the B1- and B1+ modes will always be around six decibels higher in internal cavity than in radiation measurements. This is a virtue, not a problem.

Leaving the open strings free to vibrate, as when normally played, introduces additional narrow resonances from all the sympathetically excited string partials (harmonics) indicated as g1, g2, g3, etc for the G string and likewise for the other strings.

ALMOST ALL MODERN MEASUREMENTS OF THE ACOUSTIC PROPERTIES OF AN INSTRUMENT ARE MADE WITH DAMPED STRINGS

Similar string resonances can be identified up to around 3.5kHz, above which they begin to disappear.

This is illustrated in figure 2, plotted over an expanded frequency range in the so-called 'island-bridge hill' frequency range from around 2.6 to 3.3kHz. For clarity, the measurements with open strings have been shifted downwards by 20 decibels. The plots illustrate the continued existence of largely anti-resonance dips from the partials of all four strings over the plotted frequency range. This confirms the ability and validity of internal cavity sound measurements to examine important acoustical properties well into the kilohertz frequency range.

The anti-resonances of the strings can easily be understood. When a string partial is excited, less of the available energy from the original tap on the bridge can be used to excite the acoustically radiating vibrating plates. This accounts for the dips in the radiated energy inside the cavity and, by inference, outside as well. The same will be true whenever other body modes are excited, such as the rocking frequency of the bridge and vibrating modes of the island area between the f-holes.

Such resonances may well be responsible for the tentatively ascribed rather broad minima in the overall response, as illustrated in **figure 3**. The identification of which minima are associated with a particular vibrational mode of the bridge or island area clearly remains a challenge. The assumed rocking frequency resonance of the bridge was initially proposed as a candidate for the dip at around 3kHz, which is observed in almost all types of measurements on the violin. However, this has now been eliminated as, somewhat surprisingly, removing ▹

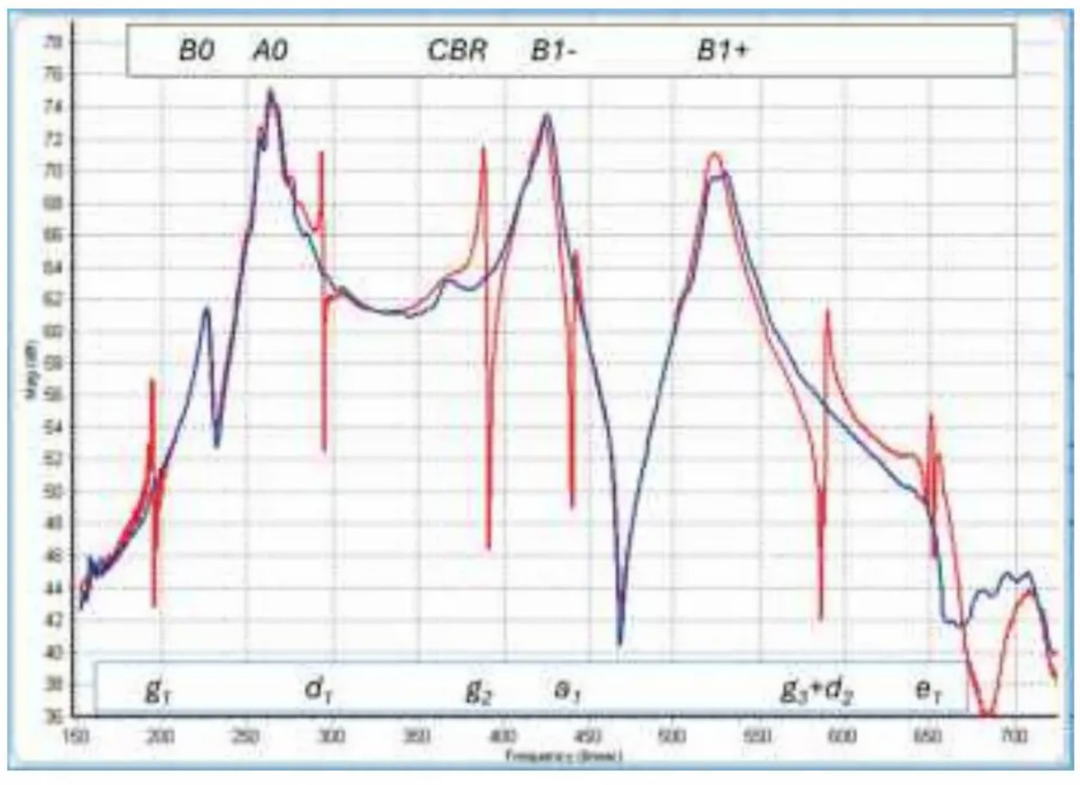


FIGURE 2 Internal cavity sound measurements for a copy of the 1715 'Titian' Stradivari violin

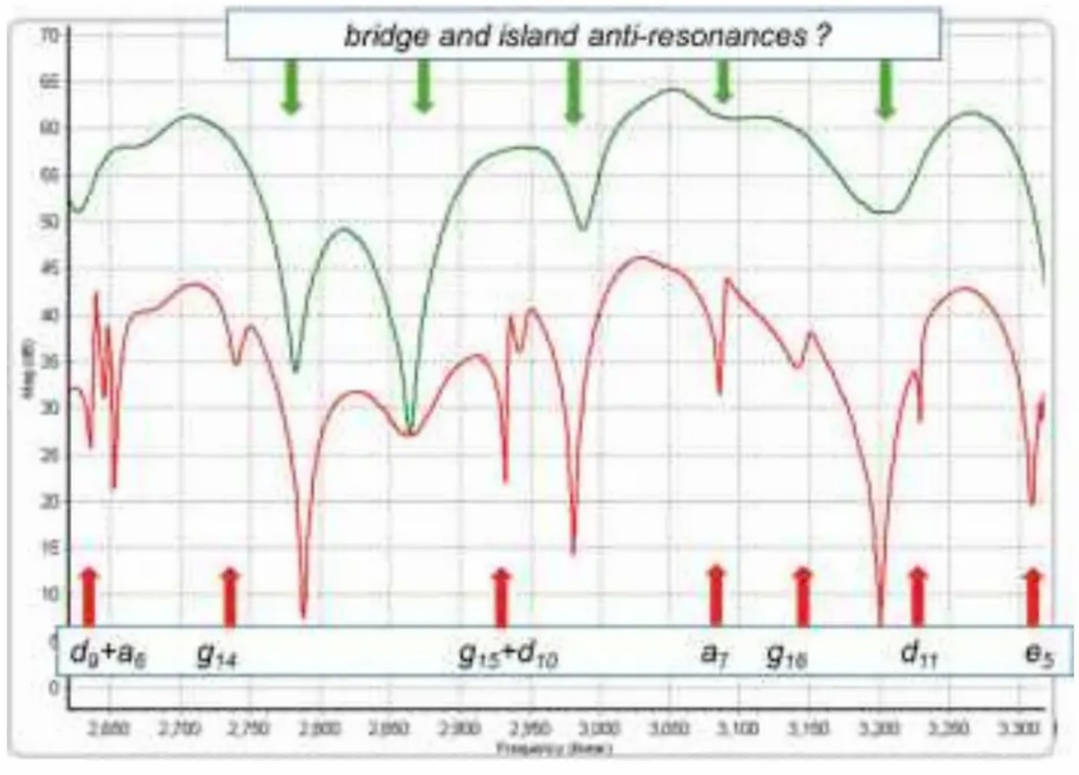


FIGURE 3 Anti-resonances displayed in the bridge and 'island' areas of the violin

the rocking mode by wedging the side slots of the bridge makes no significant difference to the observed spectrum.

Almost all modern measurements of the acoustic properties of an instrument are made with damped strings, despite their potentially important contribution to the long ringing-time sound of an instrument. In addition, the excitation of such resonances, when using even the smallest amount of vibrato, strongly influences the perceived responsiveness and playability of an instrument. This is why violinists love to play the viola, because of its longer ringing sound from the vibrating strings, which is even more apparent when playing and listening to the cello.

Top soloists, commenting on the sound of great Cremonese instruments, invariably make comments similar to those made by Tasmin Little in an inspiring BBC broadcast. After demonstrating the sound of the 1722 'Joachim, Elman' Stradivari in the old J&A Beare showroom, she remarks:

> It has an incredible ring under my ear. If it wasn't for the wonderful sound, it would be almost deafening. It is fantastically exciting and very vibrant. It's alive; there's a real spirit in there that's absolutely desperate to get out.

If we are ever to be able to correlate comments like those above with measurable features of the acoustic spectrum, then I believe the last thing we should be doing is damping the strings and averaging measurements over many directions and frequencies. This removes all the complexities of the acoustic spectrum that give each instrument its individual characteristic sound. Internal cavity sound measurements with freely vibrating strings provide a very quick and easy way to avoid doing so, while maintaining the maximum useful information that any single measurement can provide about an instrument.

THE VIOLA

Figure 4 plots a superposition of internal cavity sound intensity measurements for 25 violas made for the 'Obialto' viola project at the time of the 2017 Oberlin Violin Makers Workshop. All the instruments were made using the same outline form, although makers were free to choose the materials used, the plate graduations, arching profiles, etc. The measurements were made in a single afternoon and early evening session, using a hand-held hammer (rather than a pendulum-supported one), illustrating how easily and quickly such measurements can be taken.

Not surprisingly, the measurements exhibit generic acoustic characteristics very similar to those of a violin, but with all the resonant modes scaled downwards in frequency, as expected from the violas' increased size. The characteristics of individual instruments were compared with the average of all the instruments and potentially used to correlate differences in their acoustic spectrum with differences in the quality of their sounds.

THE CELLO

The next example, illustrated in **figure 5**, demonstrates the use of internal cavity measurements to investigate, and hopefully understand, interesting acoustical features of much larger instruments such as the cello and double bass. Measurements can be made with the same experimental set-up, apart from using a longer strip to support the internal microphone. The plotted

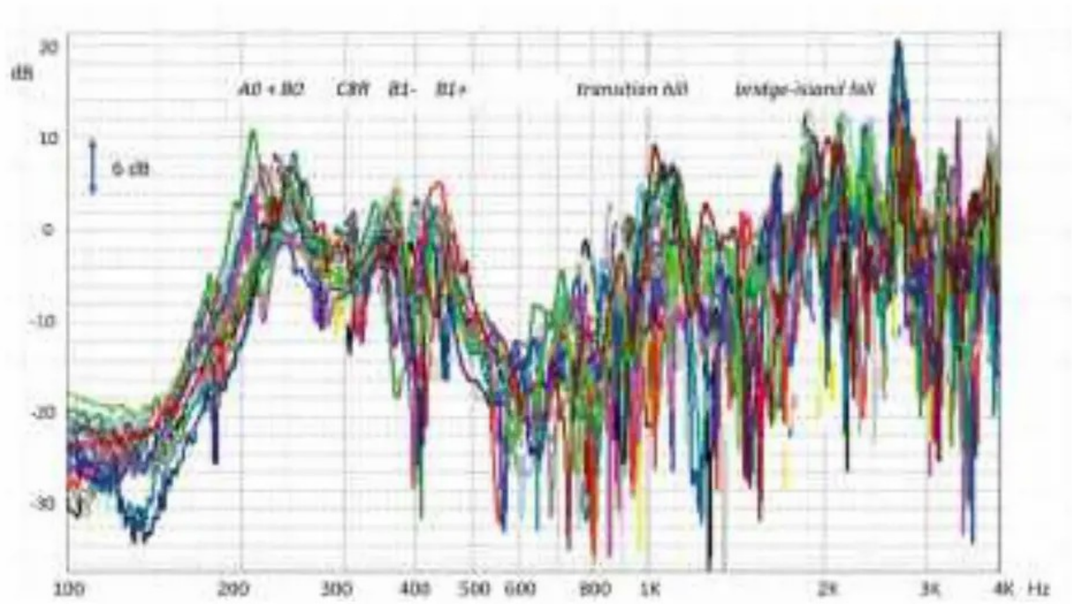


FIGURE 4 Internal cavity sound intensity measurements for 25 violas

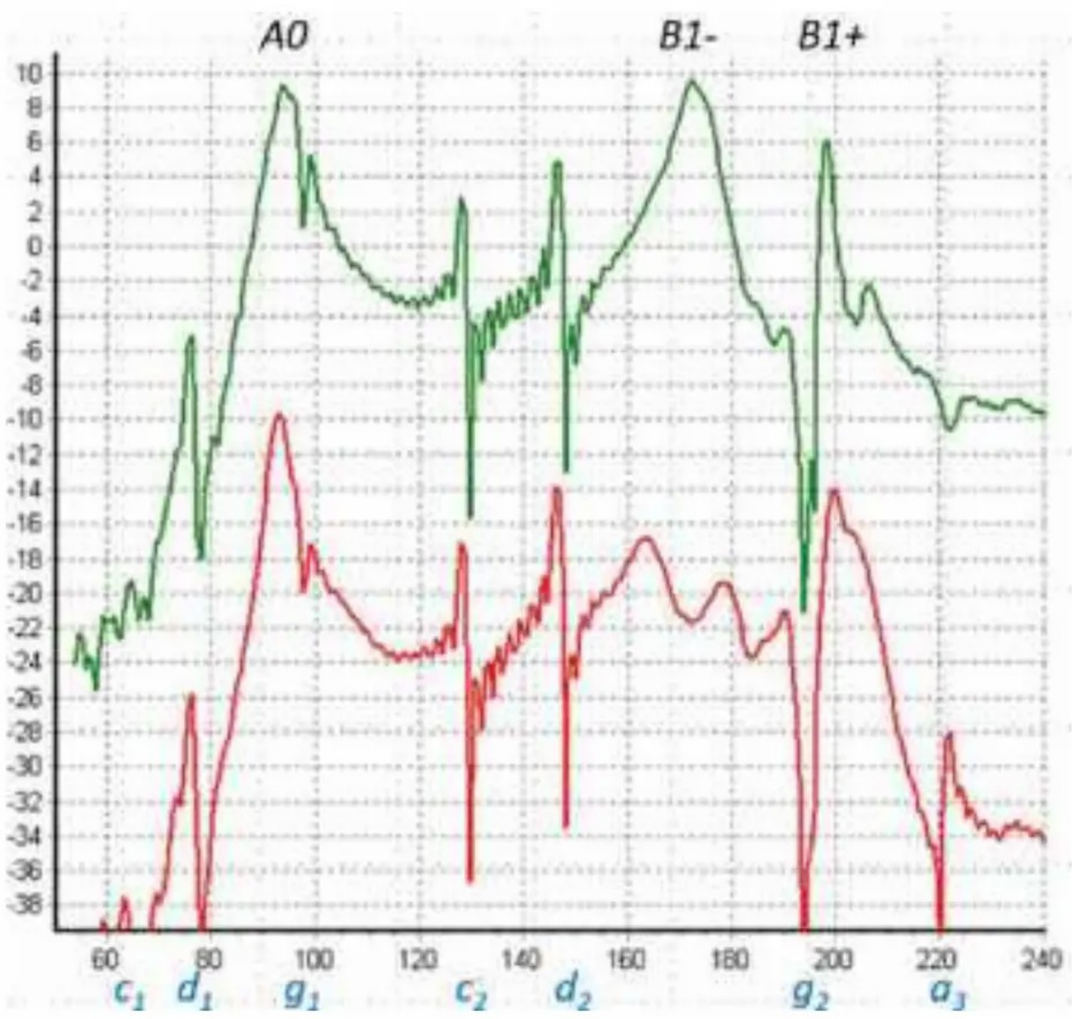


FIGURE 5 Internal cavity sound intensity measurements for a cello held upright with undamped strings

REMOVING THE ROCKING MODE BY WEDGING THE SIDE SLOTS OF THE BRIDGE MAKES NO SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE TO THE OBSERVED SPECTRUM

characteristics are for a cello held upright, lightly hand-held around the neck joint, with undamped strings. When resting on a wooden floor (upper green plot), it had a bad wolf note almost certainly associated with the strongly excited B1- mode resonance. Remarkably, when resting on an intermediate stone block (lower red plot, shifted down by 20 decibels for easy comparison), the wolf note was entirely eliminated.

The measurements were made to investigate what changes in the acoustic characteristics were responsible for this effect. Again we note the large influence of the vibrating strings on the instrument's characteristics, with the frequencies of the string

ALL FIGURES COLIN GOUGH

partials indicated beneath the frequency scale. The ripples on either side of the string resonances are an artefact of the digital processing of the measurements and analysis. These arise for narrow, ringing string resonances, which require significantly higher rates and lengths of data acquisition than used in these measurements.

Supporting the instrument on a solid stone block rather than the wooden floor clearly introduces an additional vibrational mode as evident in the lower plot. This significantly reduces the amplitude and splits the B1- resonance responsible for the wolf note. Measurements on several other cellos, but not all, have shown similar effects in their low-frequency response. Further research is required to understand fully such features of great importance for players. Internal cavity measurements are ideal for this purpose, and for makers wishing to solve wolf note problems.

THE DOUBLE BASS

For the cello and double bass, it is extremely difficult to make conventional high-quality radiation measurements free from complications from the surrounding acoustic. In contrast, **figure 6** shows some typical internal sound measurements for a double bass free of such complications.

The measurements were again made on an upright, hand-supported instrument resting with its endpin on a solid surface. This time measurements were taken with damped strings, first with a rubber endcap between the spike and hard floor, then with the endpin resting directly on the hard floor with two different spike lengths. The emphasised horizontal lines represent equal sound intensities in all three plots.

We observe an A0 resonance at around 64Hz and a strong B1- mode around 110Hz, with a smaller amplitude mode at a little lower frequency when the bass is supported on the rubber end-stop. However, when the bass is resting directly on its endpin, the latter mode is significantly decreased in frequency

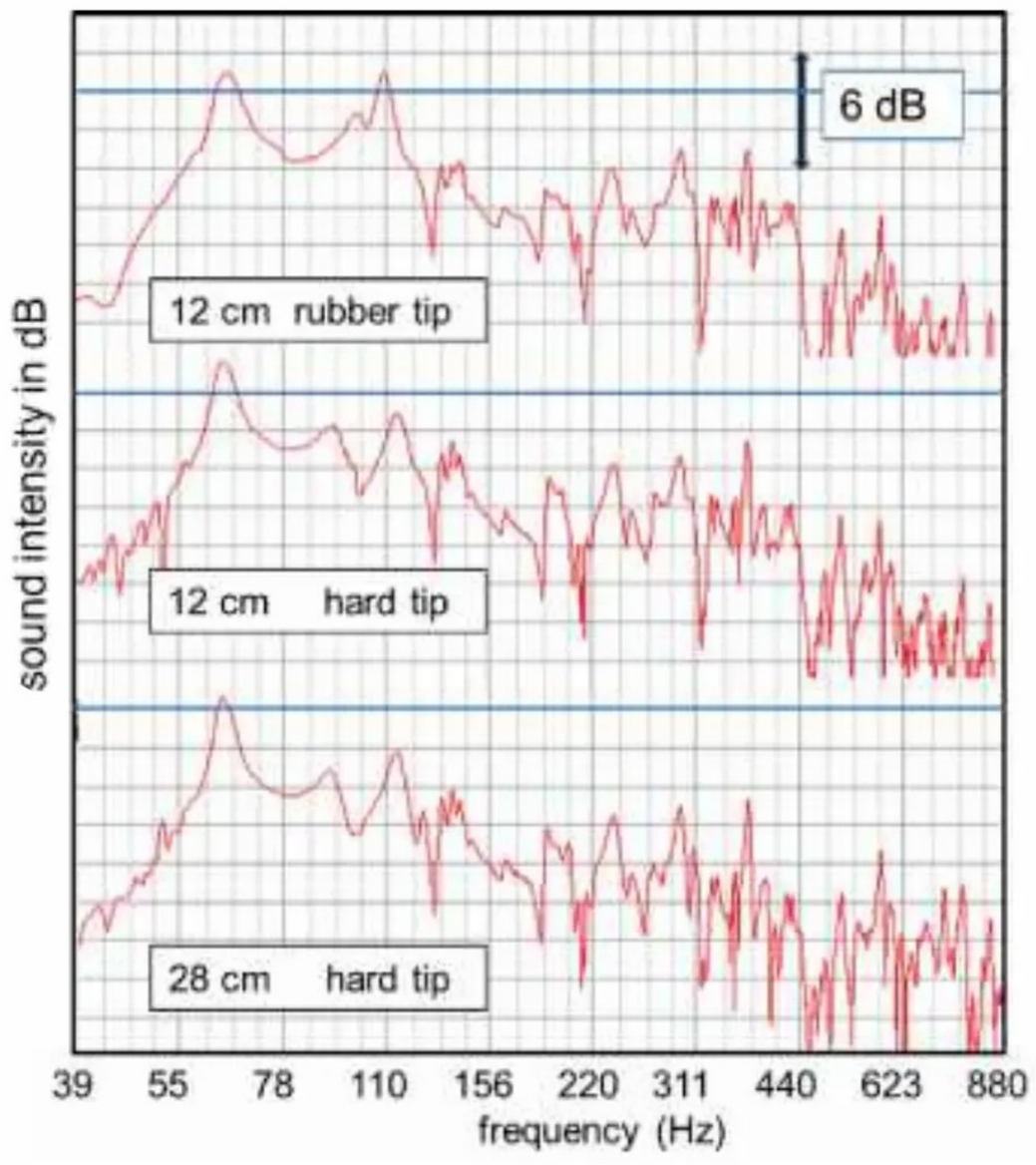
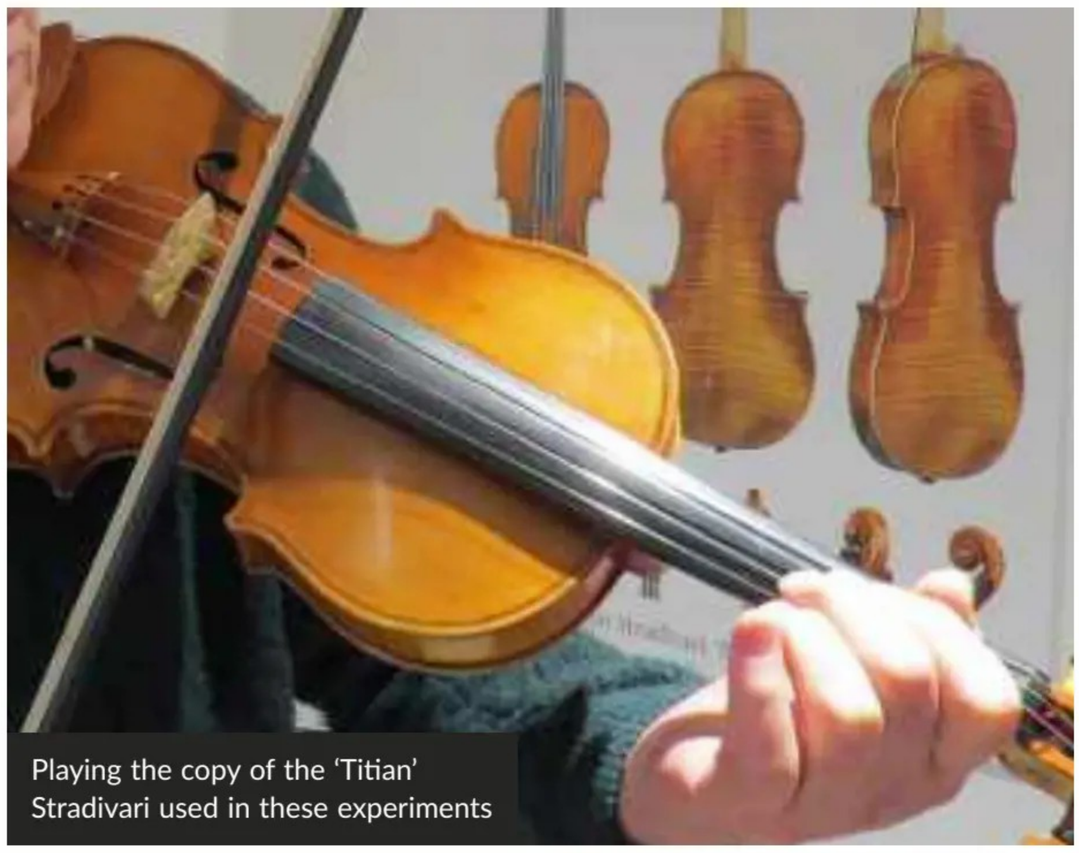


FIGURE 6 COLIN GOUGH

FIGURE 6 Internal cavity sound intensity measurements for a an upright, hand-supported double bass with its endpin on a solid surface



Playing the copy of the 'Titian' Stradivari used in these experiments

WHEN THE LENGTH OF THE DOUBLE BASS ENDPIN WAS INCREASED, THE CHARACTERISTICS OVER THE RANGE OF FREQUENCIES REMAINED LARGELY UNCHANGED

and the initial B1- mode is significantly decreased in amplitude relative to the A0 mode. When the length of the endpin was increased, the characteristics over the whole range of frequencies remained largely unchanged. Although we have yet to understand such effects fully, the measurements strongly suggest they are unlikely to be associated with the length of the endpin or its material properties. Also, as for the cello, such features may well be related to a proposed bouncing mode of the body shell itself resting on its endpin.

CONCLUSION

We hope that makers will find the above examples are of sufficient interest to consider setting up an inexpensive measurement facility in a small corner of their workshop. This can be used at all critical stages in the making, final adjustments and restoration of any classical, historic or non-Western, hollow-bodied stringed instrument. As we have illustrated, such measurements can help identify the cause and potentially help solve problems like a wolf note, in addition to problems of tonal balance at both low and high frequencies. They can also be easily made when assessing the perceived tonal quality of different instruments. But, as argued above, we believe that attempts to correlate the sound of an instrument with its acoustical properties should always be made with the open strings left free to vibrate. For myself, as both a player and acoustician, internal cavity sound measurements have been invaluable in advancing my understanding of all instruments of the violin family, as I hope they will also be for others. ●

BRIDGING THE DECADES

The design of an instrument's bridge is nowadays pretty much standardised – but it wasn't always so. Leafing through the classified pages of *The Strad*'s archives reveals a number of intriguing patterns, materials and indeed scientific justifications. The 1920s in particular seem to have been a boom time for innovative bridge makers, with several weird and wonderful examples making their debuts in the pages of the magazine.

Reading through the advertisements, one can sense a general theme in the manufacturers' claims: 'Your violin will sound like a Strad'; 'a tone equal to that of a Strad'; and 'imparting a Strad tone', whatever that might be. One bridge features two different kinds of wood, another seems to double the thickness of the normal wood, while the 'Chemical' violin bridge claims not to be made of wood at all. As for the 'four-footed' bridge, one including 'air cushions' and the 'self-adjusting' example ('a serious invention' in the maker's words), it's interesting to imagine how they might have fared in the 21st century. Any readers who might still own one of these bridges (or any other unusual examples) are welcome to share their photos and experiences with *The Strad* by emailing thestrad@thestrad.com

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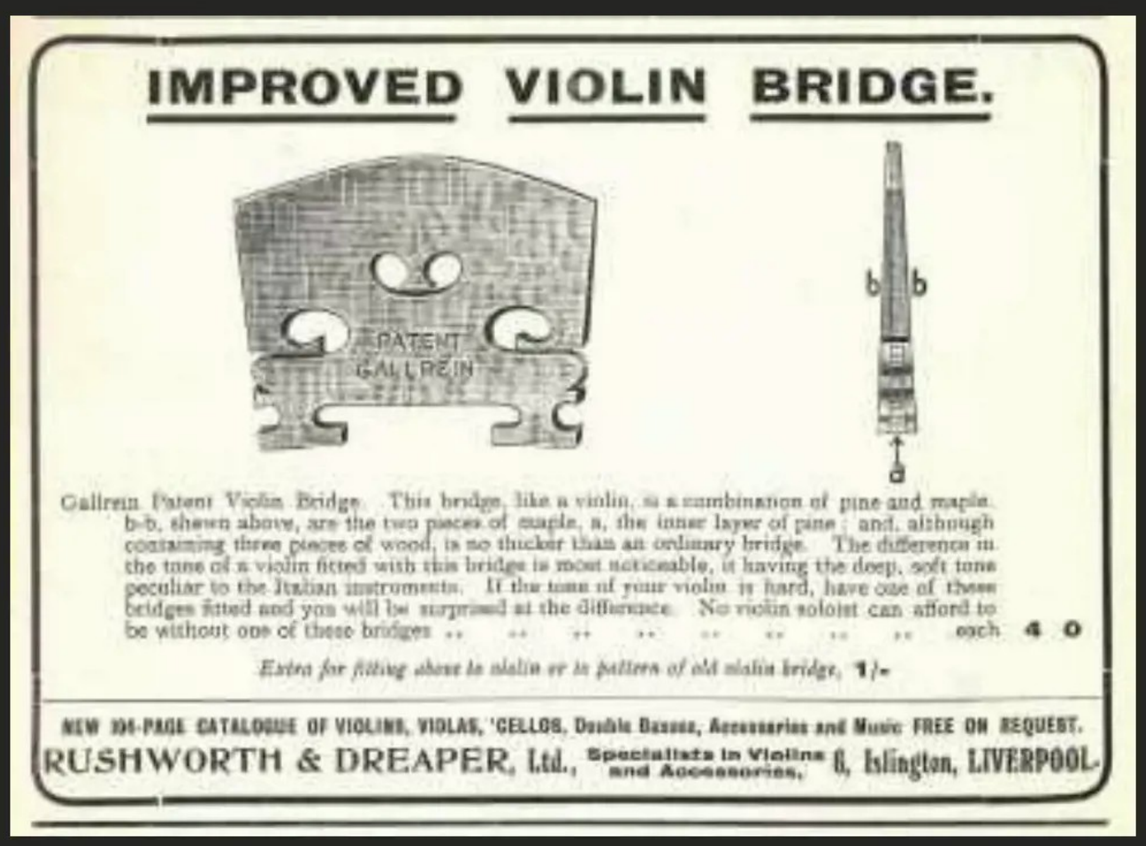
February 1909



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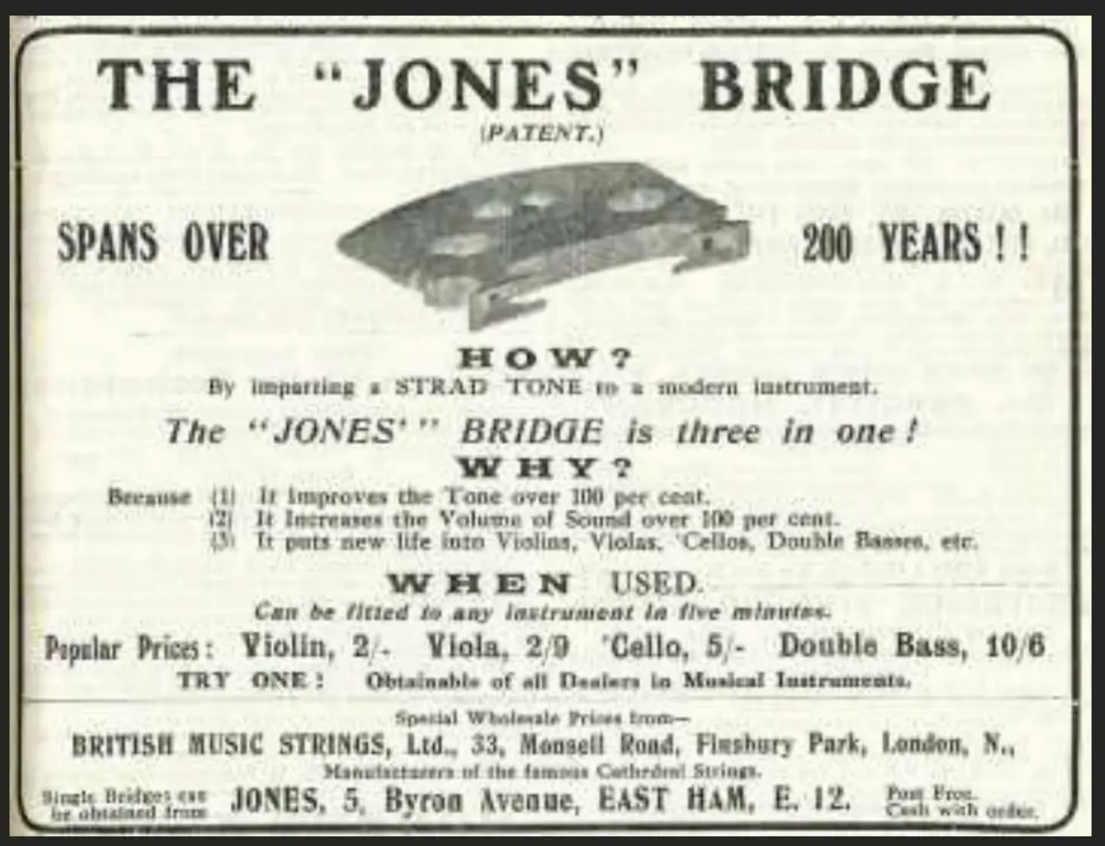

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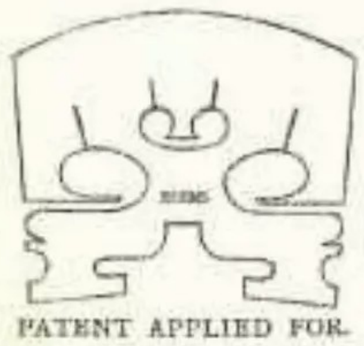

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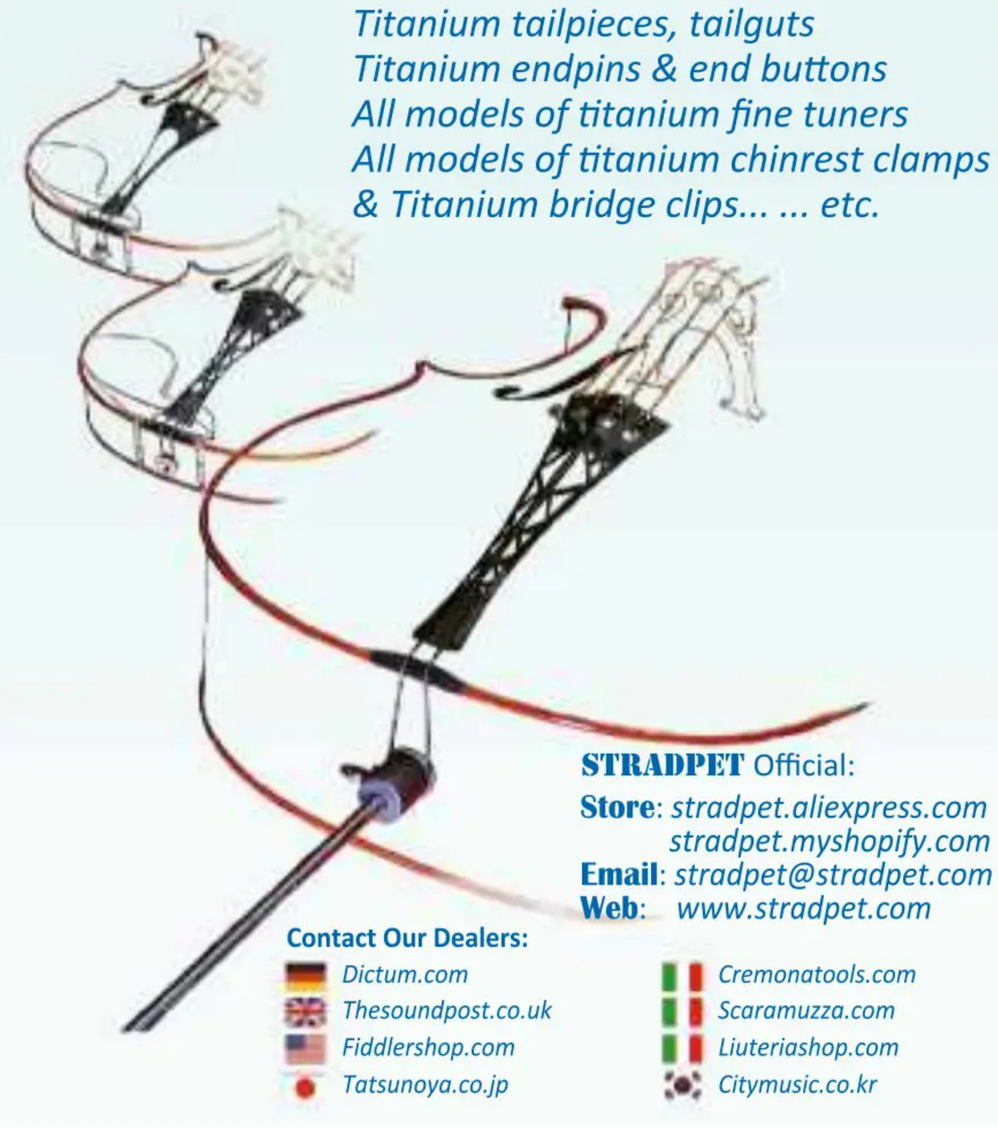

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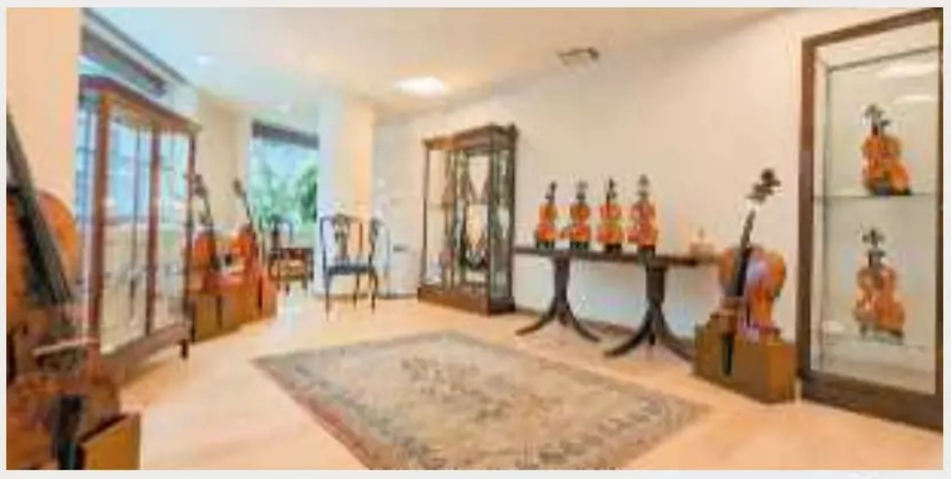

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EVASIO EMILIO GUERRA

WRITTEN BY ANDREA SCHUDTZ

Turin in the late 19th century was a large and significant city, well connected with central Europe and a major economic and political hub. Vibrant and full of culture, it was a perfect crucible for violin makers, respectful of Italian tradition as well as keen to engage with their French neighbours. It is in this world that Evasio Emilio Guerra grew up. He initially studied the violin and moved into the craft of lutherie while still young. It is possible that he may have made instruments for Annibale Fagnola. He also frequented the workshop of Romano Marengo Rinaldi. He received instruction from Carlo Oddone, for whom he constructed instruments for an extended period.

Guerra dedicated himself to construction with great devotion and attention to detail, following the Turin models of Giuseppe Rocca and Francesco Guadagnini. Like Fagnola, he periodically copied the work of Giovanni Francesco Pressenda, but these instruments are less common than his Rocca models. He also made antiqued instruments, mostly following the models of Giovanni Battista Guadagnini. However, his copies of 18th-century makers often have awkwardly antiqued varnishing, impatiently applied and with artificial scratches.

- MAKER: EVASIO EMILIO GUERRA
- NATIONALITY: ITALIAN
- BORN: 1875
- DIED: 1956
- INSTRUMENT: VIOLIN
- DATE: 1927

MATERIALS

Made in 1927, this splendid violin is a typical example of the 20th-century Turin school. The wood exhibits a unique beauty, with a one-piece maple back with a beautiful and deep flame. The top is crafted from spruce with a tight grain, which contributes to the instrument's powerful and balanced sound. Thanks to all these specific elements, it has a deep and dark voice with a surprising ease of sound production.

The scroll is crafted from a piece of maple resembling the back and ribs. It is well carved with the fluting achieved using only gouges, which have left visible toolmarks. The linings and corner-blocks are all made from willow.

FORM AND CONSTRUCTION

From an initial examination, it appears that an external mould (also known as the French mould) was employed. The typical result of this approach is a more pronounced outline of the corners, with a sharper shape. The model used closely resembles those of the Rocca school; the instruments signed by Guerra are in fact generally made on the Rocca (Stradivari) model, distinguished by clear, sharp edges and f-holes that are quite sloping.

EDGEWORK AND PURFLING

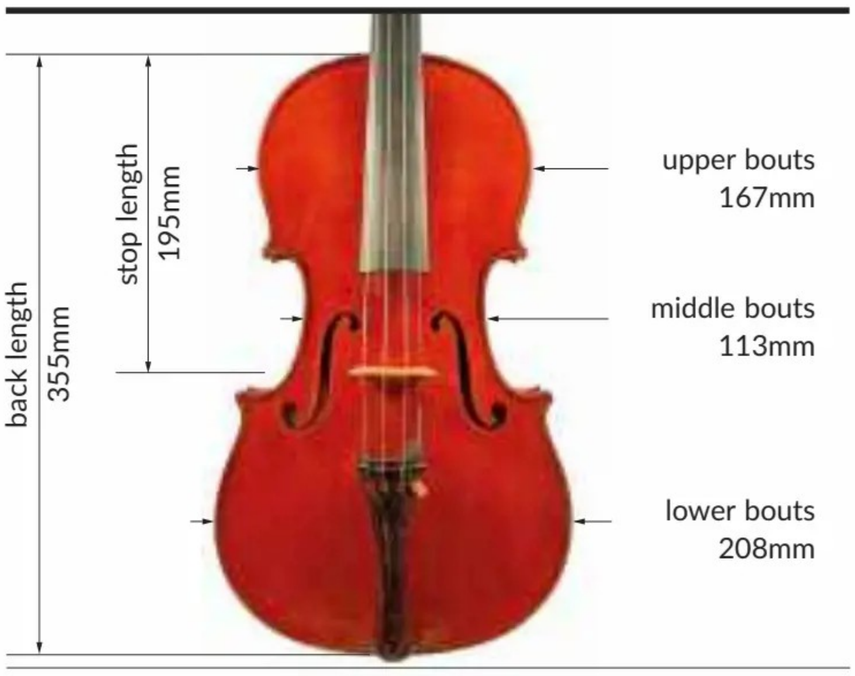
The meticulously precise purfling is typical of Guerra's work, with all three strips made from maple. The 'white' is very thick, while the stained 'black' strips are very thin and dark.

The edgework and shapes reflect the peculiar style of the Piedmontese school. It takes many aspects from Stradivari's 'Messiah' violin, which Rocca examined and copied accurately while it was still in the hands of Luigi Tarisio. French makers also copied it from the time Vuillaume brought it to Paris in about 1850.

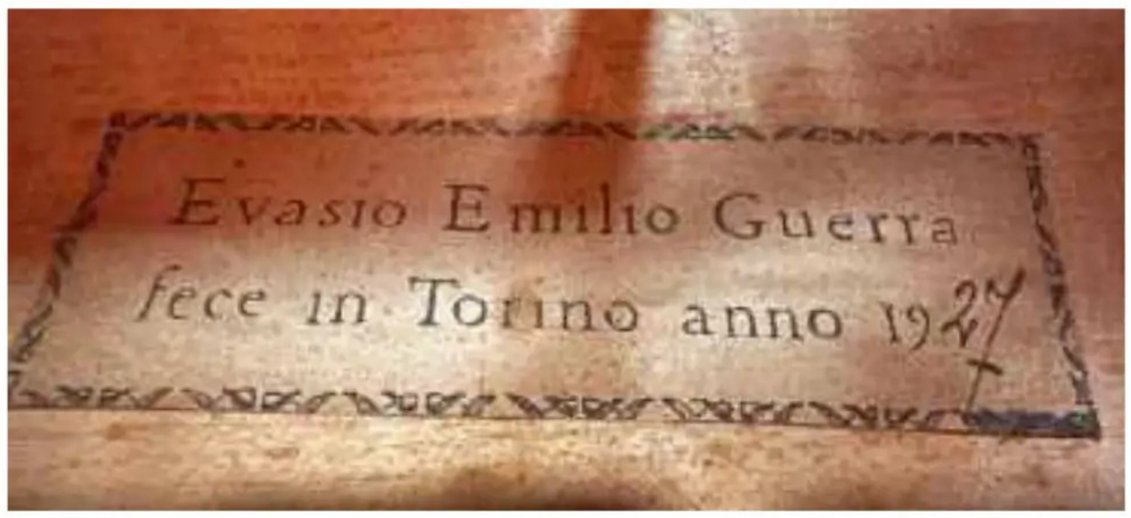
VARNISH

In general, Guerra's varnishing varies considerably in colour and consistency throughout his career. In this instance, the oil varnish is dark red, not thick but more transparent, without any sign of craquelure. ▹

ALL PHOTOS PIETRO BESCHI



All measurements taken with a tape measure



A workshop facility to measure violin family acoustics

Creating an apparatus for routine quick and easy measurements while making and setting up the violin and related instruments

BY COLIN GOUGH

Acoustician, virtual maker and violinist in Birmingham, UK

This article demonstrates how to assemble a simple workshop facility for routine acoustic measurements of the violin and related instruments during their making and final set-up. The facility is based on the use of inexpensive electret microphones. One such microphone is adapted for use as an accelerometer, to measure the frequency-dependent energy transmitted to the instrument when a light hammer is gently tapped at the top of the bridge. A second electret microphone measures the sound radiated inside rather than outside the hollow body of an instrument.

The illustrations used here are for a violin/viola measurement set-up. However, exactly the same system can be used for the cello and double bass, apart from scaling up the size of the hammer and microphone supports.

1 The components required to make the measurement include:

2 x 3.5mm stereo audio plug sockets with 3 facing terminals

1x 3.5mm audio plug socket to 2 RCA sockets

1 x twin cable connector between two 3.5mm audio plugs

1 x 10 x 10mm (diameter/height) and a 5x3mm electret microphone (1b)

2x 1microfarad tantalum capacitor

2 x 4.7k resistors

1 x 9 or 5V battery (preferable rechargeable) with connectors

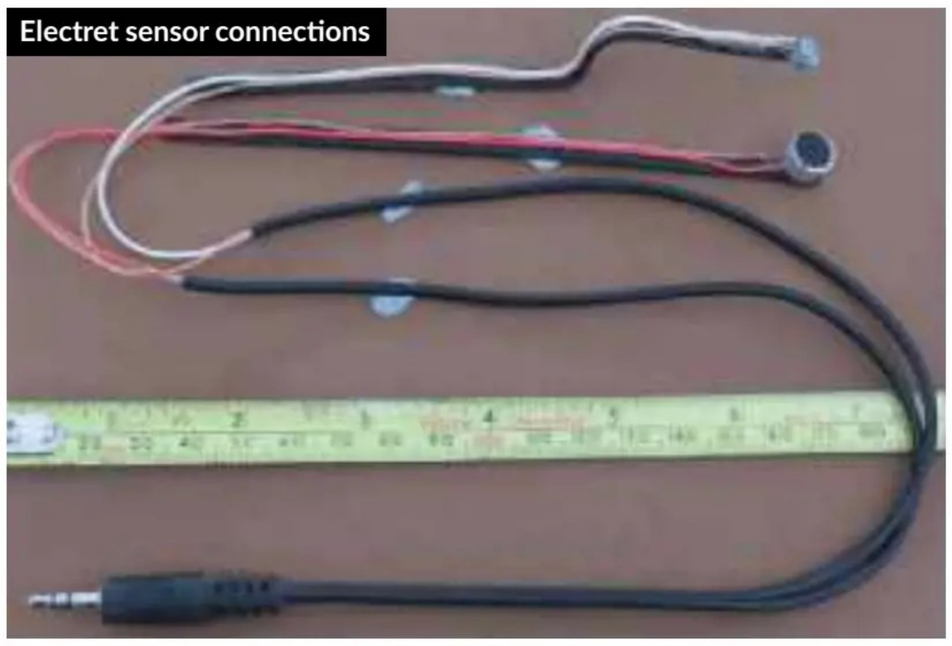
resin-cored solder and liquid flux

A small soldering iron (60-80W), an inexpensive multimeter, odd bits of wire and heat-shrink etc.

The components required

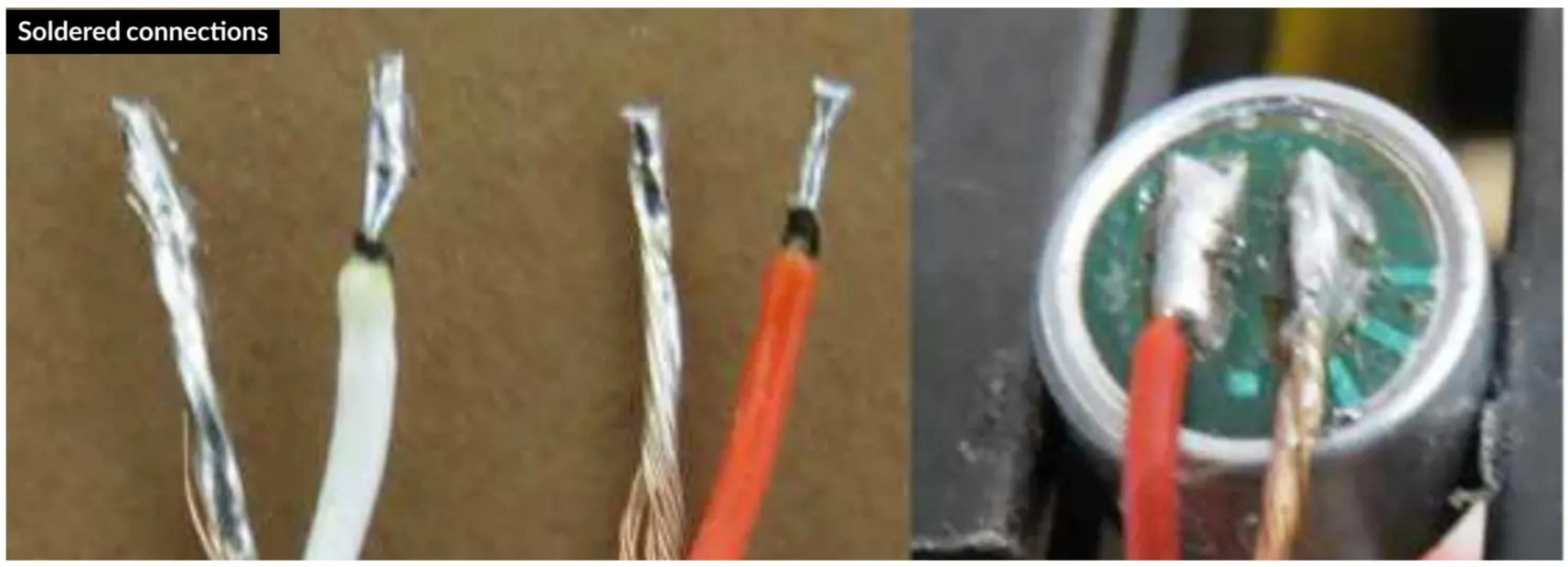
Electret microphones

ALL PHOTOS COLIN GOUGH


Electret sensor connections

2 We use a length of already separated stereo cable with a single 3.5mm stereo audio jack-plug at its end. This is cut from a longer length of stereo cable with audio plugs at both ends.

We start by cutting off typically 50–60cm for the violin and viola (approaching a metre for the cello and double bass), from the connected cables of a pair of stereo 3.5mm jack plugs. Using a strong pair of wire strippers, we progressively remove around 20cm of the outer protective covering. This exposes the pairs of wires to be soldered to the two electret microphones.


Soldered connections

3 With a pair of fine wire cutters, we first cut each pair of twisted copper and coloured wires to the same length. Then we pull off around 5mm of insulation from the ends of the red and white connecting wires. To achieve well-soldered connections, we initially 'tin' the ends of all the exposed wires with a shiny layer of solder using a hot iron and some resin-cored solder. Then, using sharp wire cutters, we cut off all but around 2–3mm beyond the insulation of the coloured wires.

For both electrets, the short length of tinned copper wire should be soldered to the right solder pad already visibly connected to the outer metal casing. This connection becomes the 0V connection for all the devices including the attached battery. The red and white wires should be soldered to the other pad, making sure there are no electrical contacts between them.

End supports

4a

Bent supports

4b

4 We then mount the two electret microphones onto the ends of 15cm sections cut from 3mm wide cable ties. We use a quick-setting glue to bond the wires along the smooth side of the cable tie. The last 15mm or so is left free.

Once this is set, the 10mm electret microphone is held in a vice with its top face horizontal. It is then converted into an accelerometer by forming a shallow hemispherical cap of 2-tube epoxy resin on its top face, without removing its protective covering. ▹

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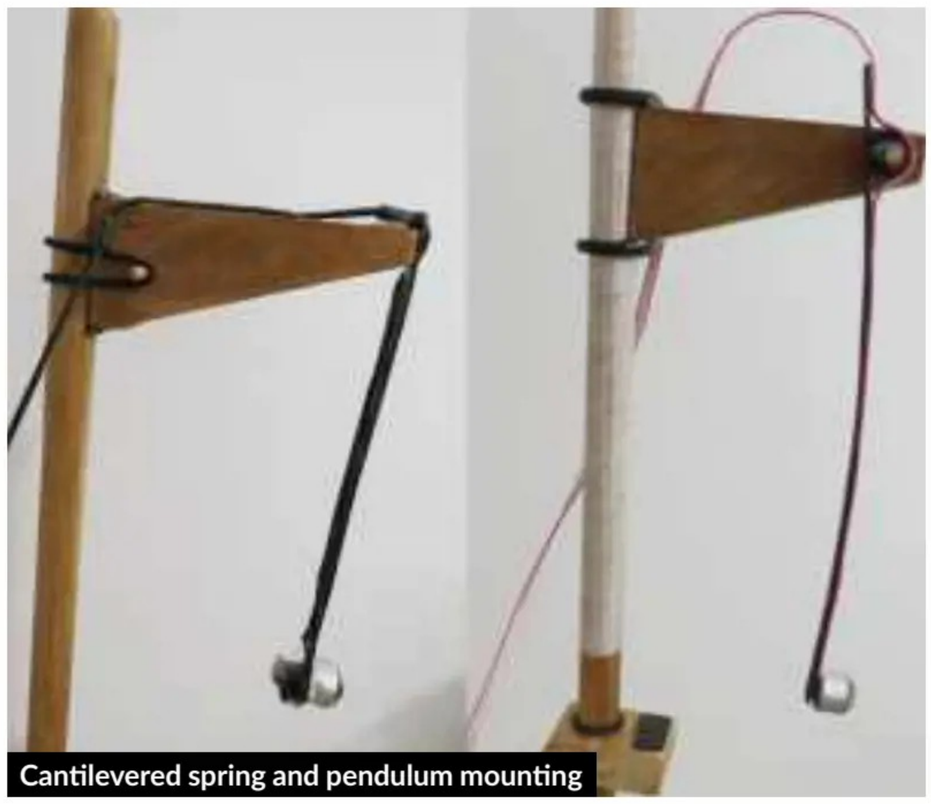
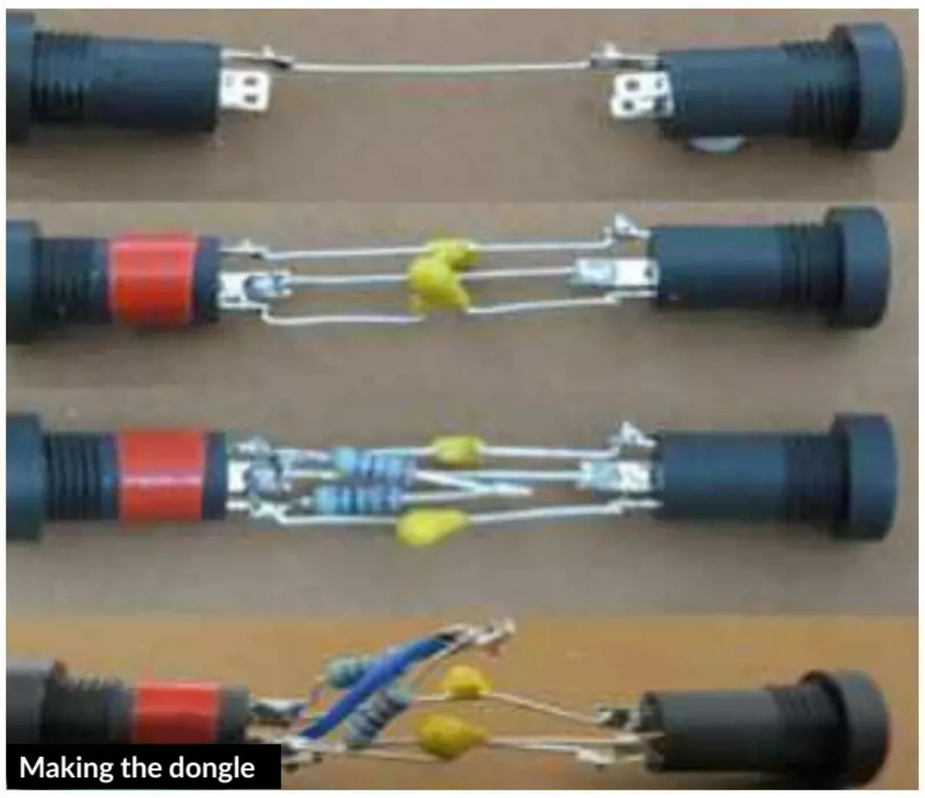


Cantilevered spring and pendulum mounting

5 The illustration shows two ways of supporting the hammer on a cantilevered support arm, which can slide up and down a vertical, circular cross-section, wooden post fixed to a heavy wooden base. The supported end of the cantilevered arm is hollowed out to match the curvature of the vertical rod. The height of the hammer head can then be adjusted to tap the top corner of the bridge at the correct position. The cantilevered arm should be sufficiently long to ensure the vertical support rod is well away from the instrument.

The support rod

6 On the left, we use a short wooden rod that passes through the arm on both sides. An O-ring (or multi-turns of a strong rubber band) can then be strongly stretched between them and around the support rod. On the right, two rubber rings are fixed to the top and bottom of the cantilevered arm using strong glue. When the glue has set, the assembly can then slide up and down the support rod.



Making the dongle

7 To make the dongle (interface) between the Behrenger amplifier and the hammer and internal microphone sensors, we take two facing 3.5mm stereo audio jack plug sockets with three connecting terminals on their back plates. We then connect them together as illustrated: first by soldering a wire between the common 0V terminals, then soldering the two 1microfarad decoupling capacitors across opposite terminals, with their positive connections (indicated on the devices) soldered to the red plug connectors. Then the two raised 4K biasing resistors are soldered to the same terminals. Finally the external battery connections are soldered to the 0V ground terminal and to the free ends of the twisted-together resistors.

8 We compact the components together, making sure there are no unwanted short circuits. We then wrap a few layers of moistened paper around the inner section of the two plugs and cover the whole system with a cylinder of heat-shrink material. With a hairdryer we then gently heat the whole assembly to make a nice-looking unit.
The power supply is either connected to a 9V battery or a rechargeable power supply. It is important to remember that the connection to the hammer and internal sound electrets should be inserted at the power supply end of the dongle.

For measurements, we normally mount the violin, viola and cello on foam pads (made from kitchen sponges) – under the neck joint and on the two sides of the lower bouts just below their maximum width. For stability, it is sensible to glue them to a wooden surface or large piece of card.

The finished dongle

LUTHIER

ROGER HANSELL

LOCATION

Leyburn, UK

I've been based at this workshop in Leyburn in the Yorkshire Dales since 1993. Prior to that I was making violins in a small workshop in the town centre, but this was before I realised there was a gap in the market for very high-quality fittings; this realisation came about very simply because I could not, at that time, source good fittings for my own instruments. I needed more space to accommodate all the equipment required for this new venture and luckily this workshop became available only three miles from my home. It allows space for my wheelchair escapades too, which is a bonus, as when I first came here I was still able to walk. When the children of clients visit, they thoroughly enjoy sitting in an office chair, clinging to my wheelchair and we go helter-skelter around the benches like a train!

My workshop takes up approximately 160 sq m on the ground floor, and also has a mezzanine where we store wood. It's huge but has allowed me to divide it into sections for varnishing, instrument making and fittings machinery, keeping the dust and dirt of making fittings completely separate from the cleaner, quieter work of violin making. It's funny that one can't do fine hand work with noise going on.

I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 1992 and for several years it did not really impact on my making. Now, though, it dictates how I work and the nature of the workshop. I must have flat floors and plenty of space for my wheelchair; in the Yorkshire Dales the choice is either a barn with lumpy floors and narrow doorways or an industrial unit, so the latter is the best option for me. This has governed the amount of light available, but it suits me well because I much prefer to work under concentrated artificial light, which clearly shows any small defects, rather than a diffuse large window over which I have little control.

INTERVIEW BY CHRISTIAN LLOYD

On the top shelf are some old violin moulds and, just out of shot, plaster casts. The red and yellow trays are full of violin fittings waiting to be hand-finished before being oiled in the oil trays (old ice cream cartons!) which can be seen on the bench.

The black flexible pipe connects to the vacuum system we use on all the fittings stations, which allows us to hold fittings on counterforms. There is also a vacuum chamber that is used to draw oil into the fittings, ensuring proper wood penetration.

ALL PHOTOS ROGER HANSELL

On the far wall you can see one of my abstract paintings from the 1980s. In my youthful ignorance I thought I would be able to pursue tandem careers as a painter and a violin maker – then reality kicked in!

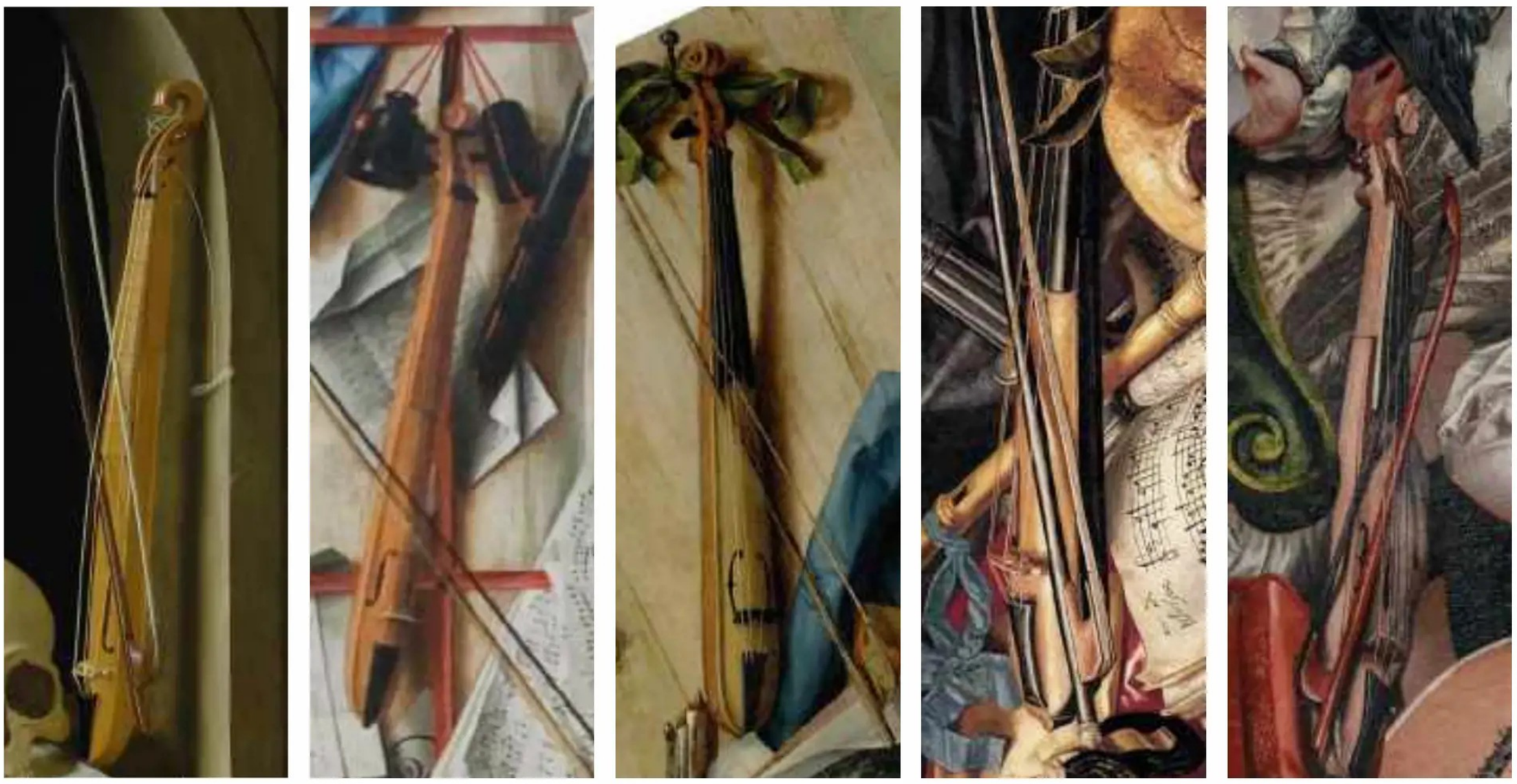
Right We use the large bandsaw on the right for converting heavier pieces of timber. On the left is the turret lathe, on which we do the ornamentation processes, alongside the fume extraction cabinet.

There's currently a peg holder in this vice. These are used to raise the workpiece to a convenient height and each person has made their own holders to suit the way they work.

We're making some sound-based alterations to this violin before it goes to the client. It's based on the 'Willemotte' Stradivari violin of 1734, which is now owned by Leonidas Kavakos.

A bridge too far?

One of the most unusual stringed instruments, the pochette can be found on show in many museum collections – but is it being displayed properly? **Wim Raymaekers** argues that the bridge position needs to be rethought



Paintings of pochettes from the 17th century clearly show the bridge below the soundholes and above the tailpiece. *Left to right* Adriaen Coorte's *Vanitas still life in a niche* (1688); Cornelis Norbertus Gysbrechts's *Trompe l'oeil of a Letter Rack with Proclamation by Frederik III* (1672); Gysbrechts's *Trompe L'oeil with Violin, Painting Tools and Self-Portrait* (1675); Simon Renard de Saint-André's *Vanitas Still Life* (c.1650); *The Paston Treasure* (c.1663). The full paintings can be viewed online in *The Strad*'s digital edition

A museum's staff is confronted with numerous questions. There are many challenges with time, resources and funding that preclude realising best practices in some instances. In other instances, practicality comes into play. And then of course there are different options regarding display and, very importantly, the condition of the objects: to what extent should one return them to their original state or, on the contrary, preserve certain changes made throughout their existence?

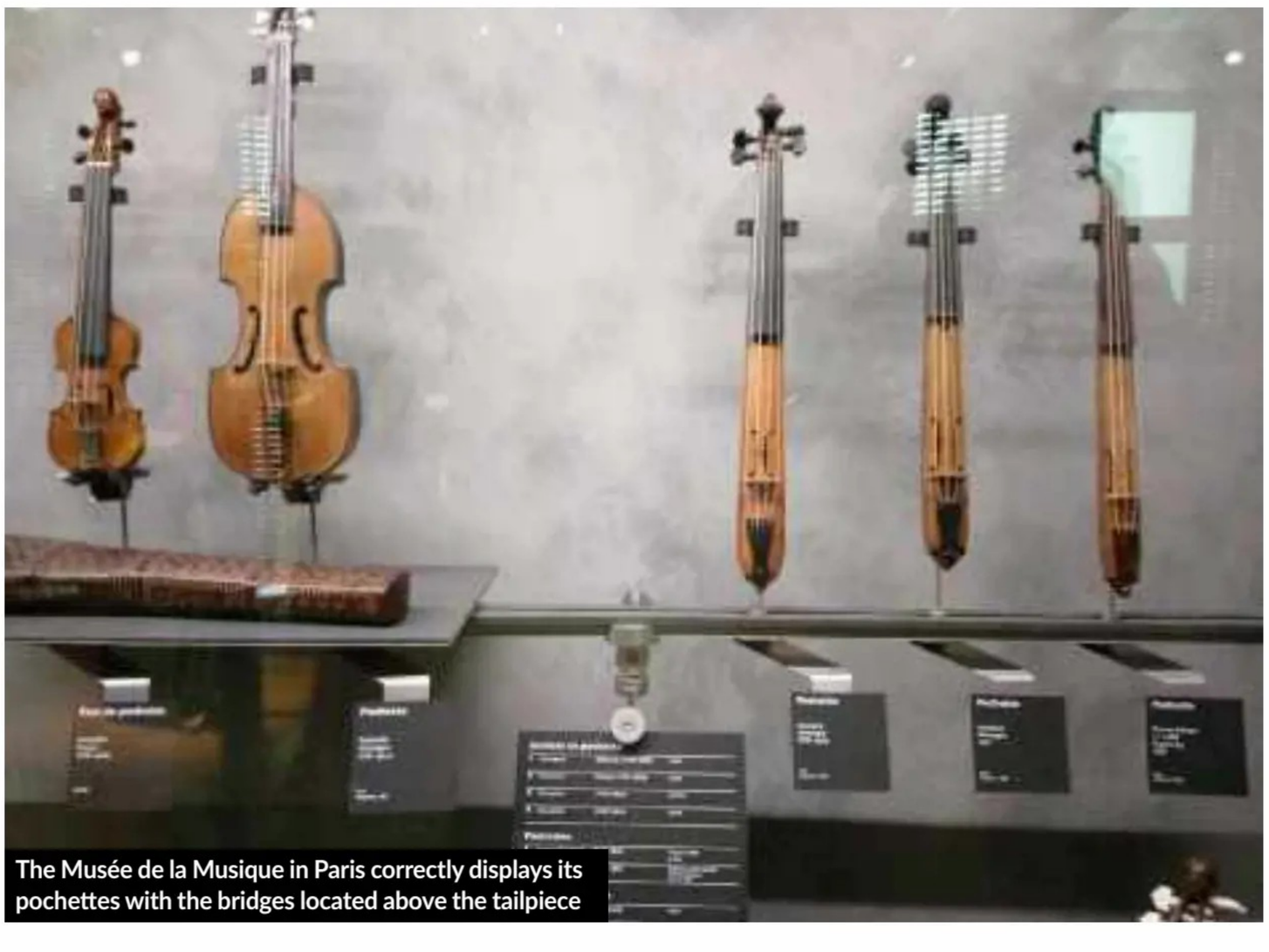
Few musical instruments appeal more to the imagination than the pochette, also called the 'kit' or dancing master's fiddle. Its small dimensions and often exuberant decoration make museum visitors curious about its underlying history, which in itself arouses wonder when they learn that dancing masters could carry it in their jacket pockets at all times to accompany the dance.

DESIGNING BRIDGES TO FIT THE NARROW SPACE BETWEEN THE SOUNDHOLES ORIGINATED IN THE 19TH CENTURY

It is therefore not surprising that these instruments find a place in the permanent display areas of many music museums around the world.

Usually they are provided with imaginative bridges, whose outlines are drawn from thin air and located between the soundholes. This especially applies to the numerous boat-shaped specimens. Designing bridges with contours that fit the narrow space between the soundholes of pochettes is a practice that originated in the 19th century.

However, positioning the bridge at the midpoint of the two soundholes is incorrect. The bridges were originally located much further down, between the soundholes and the tailpiece,



The Musée de la Musique in Paris correctly displays its pochettes with the bridges located above the tailpiece

as evidenced by paintings from the 17th and 18th centuries. Also, the convention of using the f-holes' lower notches as a guide to the bridge position only began during the 18th century. Tracking the origin and development of the f-hole, based on contemporary representations, we can see that the notches were the result of a purely aesthetic design process, with no function as an indicator for the bridge location, either on violins or, by extension, on pochettes.

So, why do so many museum displays persist in propagating this erroneous assumption about the bridge position? Perhaps it stems from the decision to display the instruments with the set-up in which they were obtained. This point of view is defensible, because it is important to respect the changes that an object has undergone since its creation. It would be absurd to attempt to restore all instruments to their original state. Extending this approach consistently would mean returning all guitars to their original number of strings, restoring Baroque necks to modernised stringed instruments and so on. It is common practice in museums to avoid the temptation of reversing the line of time

BRIDGES CAN BE MOVED TO THE CORRECT LOCATION WITHOUT DAMAGING THE INSTRUMENTS

and reinvent missing parts based on hypotheses, even well-documented ones.

In the case of the pochette, however, this can hardly be called a mere hypothesis, given the fact that the evidence is quite clear. Moreover, the problem with generally maintaining a set-up that is 130 or more years old is that most people, including specialists, will tend to believe that this was the 'original state' of those instruments. As a result, the evolution of historical insights is hampered and incorrect conclusions continue to arise – for example, regarding the pochette's original string length. The same applies to the use of pochettes in modern music practice, as seen in videos showing attempts to do so (e.g. bit.ly/3xjA8sa). As the player observes, the short stop length makes the pochette difficult to play – which in turn is because of the position of the bridge.

One of the tasks of a museum is to inform, not just preserve. One way to do this would be to rethink a situation that is more than a century old. For starters, more often than not, the bridges could simply be moved to the correct location without damaging the instruments. Managing a museum not only brings challenges but also opportunities.

It is quite possible to have new bridges made after old representations in works of art, given the number of good examples available. Moreover, many 17th- or 18th-century pochettes come without a bridge. Preparing for exhibition would be the perfect opportunity to restore such instruments to their original condition. Often the original tailpiece is also missing and has been replaced afterwards. Therefore the argument that a boat-shaped pochette does not have sufficient space between the tailpiece and the sound holes does not apply in most cases. But still today, more often than not, a new fantasy bridge is created to be placed between the soundholes, missing an opportunity to be original, to point a new path for others, and to break the conservatism that continues to dominate in many public collections.

Fortunately, there are examples of how to do better. The Musée de la Musique in Paris displays its pochettes with the bridges located where they were at the time these instruments were conceived.

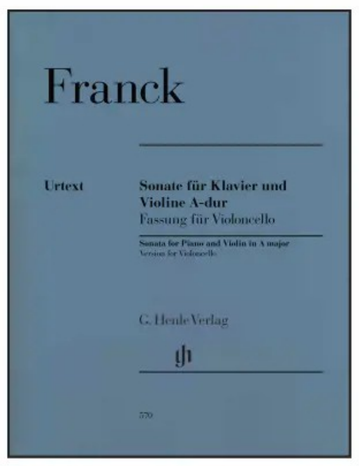
The question of how to display pochettes – and a number of other instruments for that matter – should be reconsidered in every museum that has them. Arguments should be brought forward freely and different options should be discussed openly. This topic, no matter how insignificant in itself, deserves the attention of everyone who is passionate about historical instruments. Hopefully this article may help all involved to come to well-considered decisions in this matter. ●

COORTE IMAGE ZEEUWS MUSEUM, MIDDELBURG, PASTON TREASURE IMAGE ZEEUWS MUSEUM GYSBRECHTS 1672 IMAGE STATENS MUSEUM FOR KUNST, COPENHAGEN. GYSBRECHTS 1664 IMAGE KONINKLIJK MUSEUM VOOR SCHONE KUNSTEN, GHENT. RENARD IMAGE MUSÉE DU LOUVRE, PARIS

MASTERCLASS

FRANCK VIOLIN SONATA, FIRST MOVEMENT

Taking inspiration from Jacqueline du Pré and singers, double bassist **Michael Rieber** shares tips on cultivating Franck's delicate sound world, despite playing stratospherically high on the instrument



From Franck Violin Sonata in A major. Urtext edition with marked and unmarked string parts. Ed. Peter Jost. Pf fingering Klaus Schilde. Vn bowing and fingering Yehudi Menuhin, Daniel Hope. Order no. HN 1351. ISMN 979-0-2018-1351-6. Printed with permission of G. Henle Verlag, München © 2016

I have a special relationship with this piece. I love it very much. I heard the work for the first time on the recording by Jacqueline du Pré and Daniel Barenboim, which was my reference performance for many years.

For a long time I never even thought about playing this piece. Then I heard about some crazy double bass players who did, and I had huge respect for that. When I play a transcription for double bass from other repertoire, I think that in the end it should sound as if it was originally composed for double bass. In this respect, the Franck Sonata is physically very hard to play because most of it is in thumb position. So I didn't know if I could really master it.

Playing with freedom up high

A few years ago, I played Einojuhani Rautavaara's double bass concerto. It's a piece I'd hesitated to play for years, because all I could think about was half an hour playing only in thumb position, as loud as possible and all cantabile! But after I finally performed it, I learnt so much about relaxing in thumb position; something that I bring to the Franck Sonata. You need to be completely free to capture this wonderful French mood – you can't create a sound like this if you're trying too hard on the instrument.

One of the challenges when approaching the beginning, which is marked molto dolce, is capturing a sound that is delicate, intimate and not too healthy, while playing in thumb position. I have found a fingering that works for me, which feels safe when I'm performing.

There is no dynamic marked at the beginning. In my opinion, when a French composer writes molto dolce, it should not be forte. You can decide what the dynamic should be, but bear in mind you have to hold something back because you don't reach fortissimo until bar 30. It's the same the second time around from bars 86 to 88 with the same climax, although here it's written tutta forza. So the first time around, the fortissimo should be under the dynamic

JEWGENI ROPPEL

THE SOLOIST

NAME
MICHAEL RIEBER

NATIONALITY
GERMAN

STUDIED WITH
ULRICH LAU

RECORDS FOR
ES-DUR, BAYER RECORDS, EBS RECORDS

'You need to be completely free to capture this wonderful French mood – you can't create a sound like this by trying too hard'

Michael Rieber performs French works by Desenclos, Fauré, Franck and Ravel with pianist Norbert Goerlich on their album *Nuits Blanches*, which is out now on CD and digital platforms.

of the tutta forza at the end. Jacqueline du Pré did this so beautifully, because she reaches a climax in bars 30 to 31 but you always have the feeling she is keeping something in reserve. This builds up so much tension until the second time, and then it explodes! Sometimes I try to emulate her ideas of musical architecture, which create an overall arc and narrative of the movement.

Another thing I took from Jacqueline du Pré's recording, which I aim to achieve in my playing in general, is that I try to find a sound that speaks and sounds like singing. Listening to recordings of Maria Callas, I try to imitate the phrasing and the shape of the musical line and sound like a human voice.

In the penultimate bar, there is a high D. Up until then, I think the whole character is melancholic. So you can use this arrival at the high note to open out to a major key – you can imagine entering heaven, or the sun coming out after darkness. I try to play it the way a singer would sing that interval, taking time to travel between the notes.

Balancing contact point in the right hand

When you are playing this high in thumb position, you have to keep close to the bridge with your bow, otherwise the intonation suffers. At the same time, you want to create a delicate, tasto sound, but doing this means your hands are too close together and you are shortening the length of the string. In addition, if you don't play close enough to the bridge, you won't achieve a soloistic sound on the instrument. To address this, I sometimes try to play in one position as much as possible but be flexible with the length of bow I use. It's difficult because you can't use too much weight close to the bridge, but not enough means the sound won't be right.

Smooth bow changes

From bar 47, after the piano solo, I break up the bowing so I can fit the notes into the bow. One of the difficulties of doing this on the double bass is that it shouldn't sound like you are making any bow changes, and that makes longer phrases challenging. I learnt so much from cellists about achieving smooth bow changes. This is because in my first orchestral jobs, I was always sitting behind and observing very good cellists! I learnt to play with the weight of the arm to get power on the bow, but not to push. It should be a passive movement; you just move your arm and the bow should just go. Also remember to think about the elbow; when you prepare an up bow, you should go a little bit higher with your elbow to bring power on top of the bow. Once you play the down bow, you then bring your elbow down. I think of making a figure-of-eight or the infinity symbol with my right elbow.

> 'Listening to the recordings of Maria Callas, I try to imitate the phrasing and the shape of the musical line and sound like a human voice'

Vibrato

The problem I sometimes hear when listening to double bass recordings, and especially of this sonata, is that the vibrato is very fast and doesn't fit well with the instrument's sound. Perhaps some bass players feel they need to have strong power on the string to keep it down on the fingerboard in order to produce a clear sound. This creates tension in the arm and results in faster vibrato.

I do something special, which I don't think anyone else does: I sometimes put my left thumb under the fingerboard in high positions. When you play very high and press down hard on the string, the fingerboard goes down as well, because it is not fixed that strongly. And when you're pressing you're not relaxed and this comes through in your vibrato. So I started to place my thumb as if I were in a normal, lower position, which provides me with more stability and amplitude in my vibrato. This changed my technique; I'm completely relaxed and need less power in my left arm and hand than I used to.

That said, I still need to use my thumb on the string in high positions for technical movements.

Achieving the right balance with the piano

It is a lifelong challenge to find balance with the piano. You don't want to fight against the piano by playing as hard as you can, because your intonation and sound quality will suffer. Plus you won't be relaxed.

Find out what is the top end of your dynamic range, realistically, and don't be tempted to go over that. When working with a pianist, you can give feedback to each other to create the perfect balance within your dynamic abilities. Remember to read the hall or the room in which you are playing because it's always different. Pianos are so different. Pianists are so different. You have to discover the sound you make together and explore that balance.

If you are a violinist, you will almost always be heard above the piano, so there's less of a struggle to project. But for bassists, your melodies fall within the same register as the piano accompaniment. So there are a lot of challenges in this piece in terms of making sure that your lines are heard in the way that you want, but you can use the strategies in your left and right hands to counteract this. ▹

INTERVIEW BY DAVINA SHUM

To be played in double bass solo tuning (F#-B-E-A). Written notes are at concert pitch

Sonate

À Eugène Ysaÿe

Violine

Komponiert 1886 · Erschienen 1887

Allegretto ben moderato

CFF 123*)

pp *molto dolce*

sempre dolce 8va

poco cresc.

più cresc.

pp *molto rit.* *a tempo* *molto cresc.*

12

ff

dim. *dolcissimo*

sempre dolciss.

*) Siehe *Vorwort*. *) See *Preface*. *) Cf. *Préface*.

Vervielfältigungen jeglicher Art sind gesetzlich verboten.
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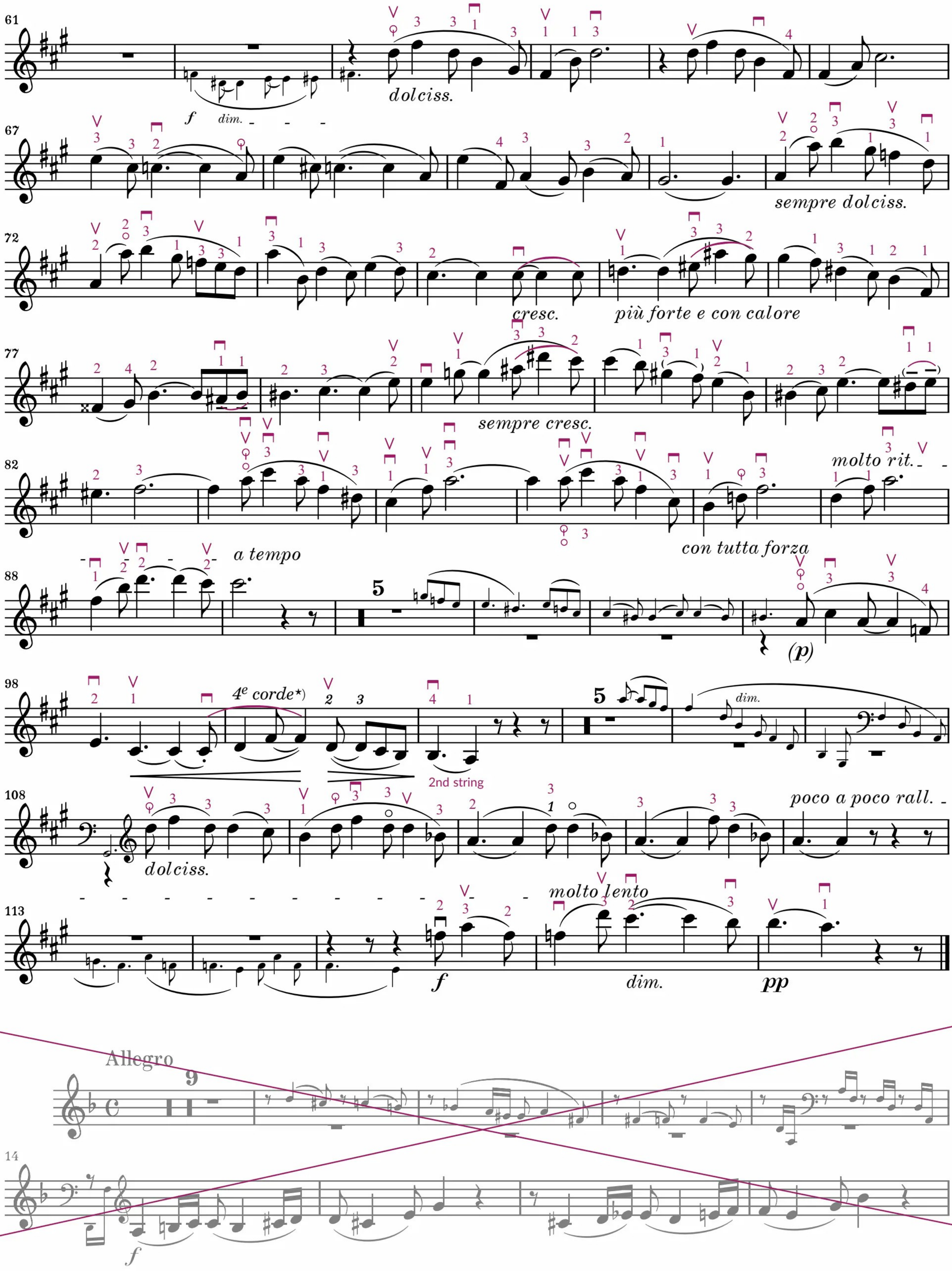

61
dolciss.
f dim.
67
sempre dolciss.
72
cresc.
più forte e con calore
77
sempre cresc.
82
molto rit.
a tempo
con tutta forza
88
5
(p)
98
4e corde*)
2nd string
5
dim.
108
dolciss.
poco a poco rall.
113
molto lento
f
dim.
pp
Allegro
9
14
f

May the 5ths be with you

Using simplification to achieve better technique

NICOLAS DUPONT

Professor of violin at the Conservatoire Royal de Bruxelles, Belgium

BORN
Brussels, Belgium

STUDIED WITH
Dejan Mijajev,
Yuzuko Horigome,
Rodney Friend

TEACHES
ages 15–30

The influence of my teachers Dejan Mijajev and Yuzuko Horigome in Brussels and Rodney Friend in London shaped me into the violinist I am today. It was their work that inspired me to become a teacher myself, even from a young age.

While I was his student at the Royal Academy of Music in London, Rodney Friend was further developing his teaching by exploring the multiple benefits to the violinist of practising in intervals of a perfect 5th. His passion for his ongoing work was such that he would often enthuse about having found something new, and his students of the time were given all sorts of new exercises to try and feed back on. It was fascinating to be in on the journey as a guinea pig and I felt especially close to his work because I also proofread his book *The Violin in 5ths*, which was eventually published by Beares Publishing.

This method has been hugely helpful in honing and working on technique in a number of areas and I have turned to it again and again. As a teacher who had a good experience as a student myself, I inevitably start with what I know worked (and still works) for me, and it has been very good to see the way that my students benefit from this way of thinking. Too often they come with problems that relate directly back to the position of the left arm, and this method is a very useful tool to address this issue and others such as tuning and sound production.

IN A NUTSHELL

Playing in double-stopped 5ths in your practice is a useful short cut to improving many aspects of your technique.

LEFT HAND

This method uses the parallel finger pad on two adjacent strings as a starting point towards the correct positioning of the arm and elbow

- Since it is literally impossible to play 5ths in tune with a poor left-hand elbow position, this requirement causes good positioning of the left-hand arm
- In turn, playing with a good left-hand elbow position makes it easier to play in tune, so intonation becomes less of an issue
- Because to play in 5ths you need to touch two adjacent strings with one of your left-hand fingers, it is necessary to play with your finger pad rather than the fingertip. This means that your vibrato is less likely to oscillate off the note, as it may do on the narrow finger tip.
- This way of working means that the fourth finger gains strength. Because it lies flatter on the string, the movement originates from the base knuckle, which is a strong joint.

GABRIEL HOLLANDER PHOTOGRAPHY

RIGHT HAND

Playing across two strings simplifies muscle memory. If you are practising a passage that is written on two adjacent strings, there will be one position of the bow angle in practice. When you come to play the passage as written, string-crossings will be neater with more economy of movement.

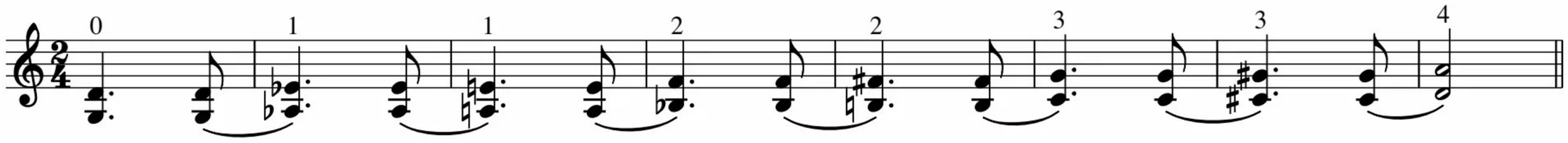
GET THE FEEL

- Hold your violin as a guitar (as many violinists do to try something out). Notice that this gives you a very relaxed hand position and that your fingers will naturally fall on to the fingerboard on the flesh of the finger.
- Pick up your violin as if you're going to tune it with harmonics. Again, notice it is natural to do this with the flesh of the finger.
- Now imagine that your violin fingerboard is equipped with guitar frets, so that you start to think in parallels. So, just as you would tune your violin strings in 5ths, think of tuning your fingers (1,1, 2, 2, 3, 3, 4, 4) as you are playing. While you are experimenting with this, make sure you pay attention to the position of your left-hand arm.

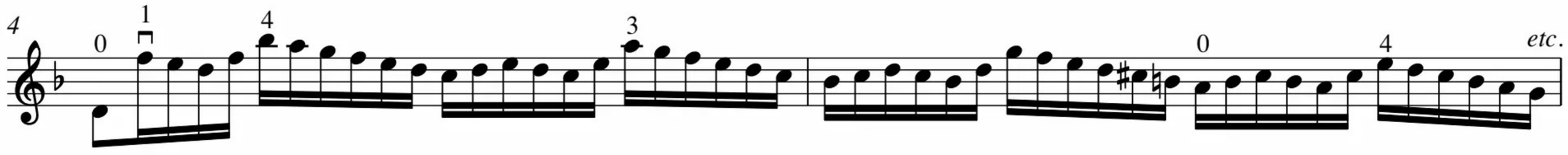
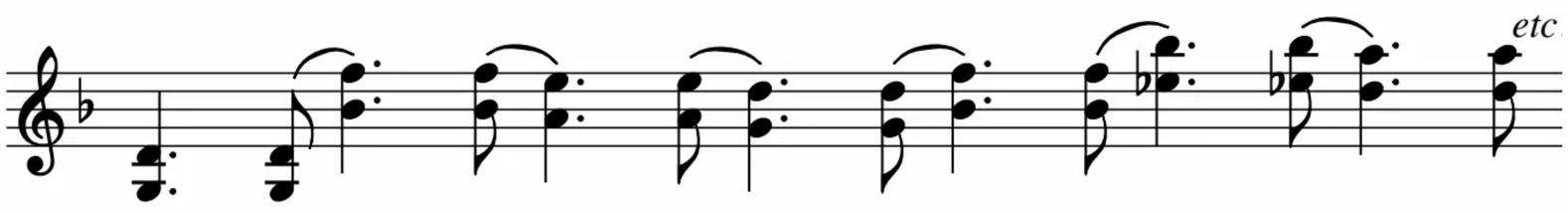
FIRST EXERCISES

Start by practising open-string 5ths to orientate your right arm. Then try slow chromatic scales as shown in **exercise 1**:

- Shift on the flesh of your fingers to each new 5th, making each one expressive by using a soft vibrato
- Support each shift with a bit more bow speed, leaning into the change of pitch
- Listen as you go and aim for the best possible sound, but accept a small diminuendo near the tip of the bow
- Aim for a feeling of intention and direction within the slur each time
- As you play, take your mind to the left-hand arm/hand, then to the right

EXERCISE 1 Also try arpeggios in the same way

REPERTOIRE

Practise this passage from the Gigue in Bach's Partita no.2 in D minor (**example 1**), and similar ones, in 5ths, as shown below (**example 2**). Playing like this takes out the string-crossings and sets the muscle memory. It 'simplifies' the passage and secures the hand position. Practise note by note, slurred, with vibrato on the A and E strings. ▹

EXAMPLE 1 Excerpt from the Gigue in Bach's Partita no.2 in D minor BWV1004

EXAMPLE 2 Version of the first part of bar 4 of example 1, simplified for effective practice

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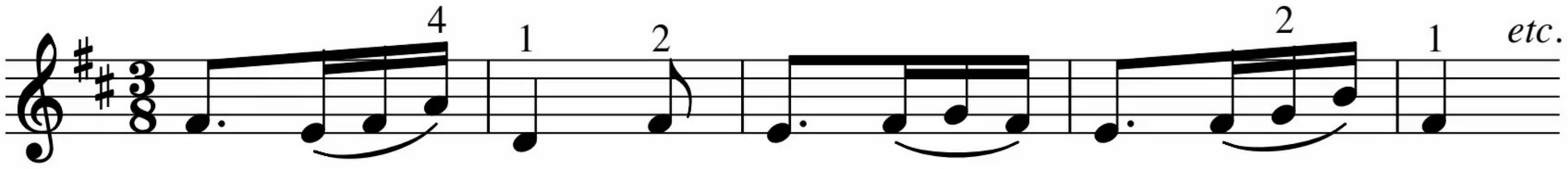
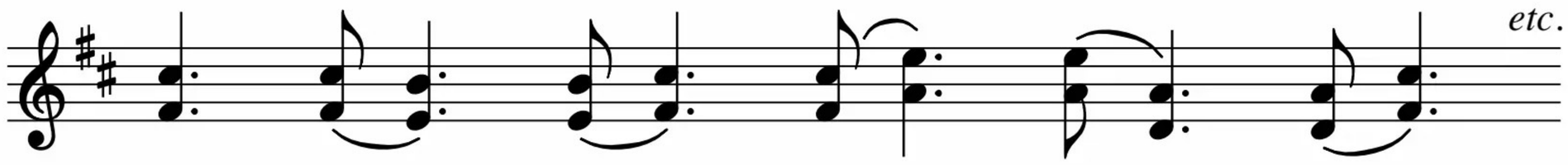
Next, practise the following phrase from the Adagio in Brahms's Third Violin Sonata (**example 3**). Use vibrato and make a beautiful sound; the version of the first two bars in 5ths (**example 4**) will orientate your left hand and elbow to help with your tuning so that you can focus on the music when the time comes.

EXAMPLE 3 Excerpt from the Adagio in Brahms's Third Violin Sonata in D minor

EXAMPLE 4 Version of the first two bars of example 3, simplified for effective practice

IN YOUR PRACTICE

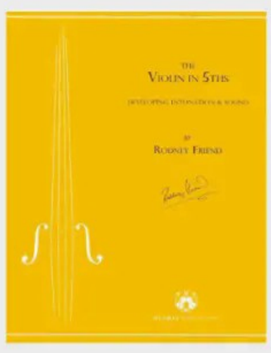
- 'Tune' each hand with a 15-minute warm-up. Start with the left-hand exercises mentioned in **exercise 1** with a soft vibrato, then check in with your bowing in front of a mirror
- As you practise other music invent your own exercises in 5ths, especially when the music is in lower positions or on two strings
- When practising octaves, play your bottom octaves in 5ths with the first finger and add the top octave with the fourth finger
- Once you have practised in this way and returned to the music as it is written, 'think-sing' with your left hand and 'think-dance' with your right
- If you find that your concentration is waning, take a break and return to it later

TIPS FOR TEACHERS

- Include your students as you analyse and deliberate. Consider the 'why' of everything. Why was that better? Why was that not so good? Students can then take this way of thinking with them into their practice rooms.
- Be open-minded and experimental; while this approach has real value, it should always be used in a way that will help the individual student
- Look at photos of great players to notice the way that many of them play on the flesh of the finger rather than on the tip

INTERVIEW BY NAOMI YANDELL

FURTHER MATERIALS



The Violin in 5ths by **Rodney Friend** has been immensely influential and helpful to me as a player and as a teacher.

And here is Rodney Friend on this subject at Stradfest in 2019: bitly.ws/3hfJD

NEXT MONTH
Violist Clifton Harrison on continuity and intention in the bowing arm

Reviews

Your monthly critical round-up of performances, recordings and publications

CONCERTS

New York

Compelling storytelling from the Jack Quartet

JACK QUARTET

ROULETTE 15 MARCH 2024

Composer Natacha Diels has answered the prayers of anyone who has dreamt of seeing Jack Quartet cellist Jay Campbell sitting around a campfire and strumming a banjo. Among a flood of playful reveries – with Christopher Otto, Austin Wulliman and John Pickford Richards as collaborators – this episode seemed to embody the 'cherished absurdity' of *Beautiful Trouble*, Diels's latest landscape.

In her evening-length piece, described as 'an opera for string quartet', Diels challenges the four players with requests for vocalising, percussion (for some reason, a small hotel bell lingered in the memory) and a set of slender reed tubes that evoked alphorns. The musicians' usual stringed instruments were always in play, but set against a blizzard of choreographed head, neck and arm movements, with digital effects onscreen behind them.

With typical eagerness, aplomb and occasional deadpan wit, the Jack foursome plunged into the composer's wide-ranging, intricately plotted melange of sound and images. Diels's video proved a formidable presence in its own right, with flickering arrays of flamingos, ocean waves, animated characters and abstract digital patterns, throughout the 75-minute timespan.

Now and then I wondered what groups such as, say, the Guarneri or the Budapest quartets might have thought of this piece. But those notions soon gave way to contemplation of the string quartet universe in 2024, the technology available, and the way that composers and musicians grow from the latest developments and new tools; and there's no question that the Jack Quartet is leading the way.

BRUCE HODGES

TAKÁCS QUARTET

92NY, THERESA L. KAUFMANN CONCERT HALL
13 MARCH 2024

From the effervescent opening of Haydn's 'Sunrise' Quartet to the closing Presto of Beethoven's op.59 no.2 – and with a New York City premiere in between – the Takács Quartet brought brilliant, inspired playing to the stage of the 92NY. The quality of Edward Dusinberre's sound throughout the programme and especially in the Haydn was unforgettable; he led the quartet with elegance and sophistication.

JOE LAMBERTI

THIS MONTH'S RECOMMENDED RECORDINGS
Our pick of the new releases

Probing Beethoven from **Mullova** and **Beatson**
PAGE 84

Trio Boccherini thrills in Hungarian rarities
PAGE 86

A searing new Shostakovich cycle from **Quatuor Danel**
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Zimbabwean composer Nokuthula Ngwenyama's new work *Flow* followed the Haydn: a musical response to the cycles and patterns of the natural world, portrayed through glissandos, harmonics, tremolos, repeating rhythms, drones and patterns of unisons and then disparity as musical voices came together and then separated again. The Takács brought a playfulness to it but also a depth, and there were some fine individual solos in the final movement.

Beethoven's Second 'Rasumovsky' Quartet closed the programme, given with flawless ensemble and gorgeous colours and textures, particularly in the development of the Allegro. Second violinist Harumi Rhodes's melodic line in the Molto adagio offered a captivating warmth and generosity, and when paired with the heartbreaking drama of cellist András Fejér's octaves made for a movement filled with intensity and deep beauty. The rustic earthiness and impressive dynamic contrasts of the Allegretto offered a welcome light-hearted contrast to the slow movement and there was plenty of imagination and vivacity in the finale.

LEAH HOLLINGSWORTH

Philadelphia

AIZURI QUARTET, KIM KASHKASHIAN (VIOLA) MARCY ROSEN (CELLO)

AMERICAN PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY 24 MARCH 2024

Whether intended or not, this well-conceived afternoon with the Aizuri Quartet made for a fine way to celebrate Women's History Month, with striking bookends by Reena Esmail (b.1983) and Fanny Mendelssohn (1805–47). In between came two sextets, with violist Kim Kashkashian and cellist Marcy Rosen joining the foursome for a luxurious textural contrast, first in Shulamit Ran's *Lyre of Orpheus* (2008), which requires one of the cellos to be tuned down a third, creating even greater lower resonance. A sensuous chestnut followed, the Sextet from Richard Strauss's *Capriccio*.

Esmail's 'Fantasie (Bihag)' from *Ragamala* (2013) was a gorgeous starter, its opening strains demonstrating the sheer tonal beauty of cellist Caleb van der Swaagh and violist Brian Hong – both of whom joined the ensemble last year – and fine complements to the sweetly sustained phrases by the Aizuri's violinists, Emma Frucht and Miho Saegusa.

In contrast, the exuberant Fanny Mendelssohn String Quartet in E flat major (1834) that closed the concert only reinforced the feeling that it deserves a more central place in the repertoire.

Additional works included the Capriccio from Felix Mendelssohn's Quartet op.81, in a satisfyingly peppy reading, and 'Die stille Lotosblume' from Clara Schumann's *Sechs Lieder* op.13. The latter made an especially verdant oasis, flowing like spring water from the group's lithe hands and fingers.

BRUCE HODGES

The Aizuri Quartet at its sophisticated finest

TITILAYO AYANGADE

TESLA QUARTET

THE BLACK SQUIRREL CLUB 30 MARCH 2024

Given that the word 'chamber' in chamber music implies options other than traditional concert halls an unusual venue is to be welcomed. In this case, the headliner was the Black Squirrel Club, a steam plant from the 1890s in Fishtown, one of Philadelphia's grittier neighbourhoods. To inaugurate a series of three evenings in the space, conductor and vocalist Micah Gleason chose the intrepid Tesla Quartet.

The party began with a high-spirited take on Haydn's String Quartet op.33 no.2, 'The Joke', given appropriate rusticity in the initial movement. In the final Presto, the foursome summoned up superb comic timing that coaxed a laugh out of many in the audience.

Stacy Garrop's Fourth String Quartet, 'Illuminations' (2011), takes inspiration from the landmark medieval book *The Hours of Catherine of Cleves*. It's a virtuosic set of five scenes from the book, ranging from the furious rhythms of 'The Mouth of Hell' to the intense love in the finale, 'Trinity Enthroned'. The challenges it posed only proved the Tesla players to be unstoppable.

Last, Ravel's String Quartet, which gained new insights from contrasts: the composer's heightened colours blooming against the room's towering brick walls and factory-style windows. For a rapt audience, seated on the club's vintage church pews, the results were vividly projected – and as comforting as an embrace from an old friend.

BRUCE HODGES

London

MARMEN QUARTET

WIGMORE HALL 25 FEBRUARY 2024

The Marmen Quartet had a full house for its Sunday morning concert. The leader, Johannes Marmén, addressed the audience at the start, not to talk about the music but to thank Wigmore Hall for refurbishing the backstage bathroom! The players then gave a colourful performance of Haydn's D major Quartet op.33 no.6, with many different characters in the first movement, the jaunty first subject neat and flowing, followed by passages of stillness and warmth. The Andante was a study in sustained lines; the musicians leant into the suspensions, and Marmén played his semiquaver passages with expressive freedom. The trio (though not called as such) of the Scherzo had touches of rubato and a wit that carried through to the finale, with colourful accents from the leader.

The first movement of Debussy's String Quartet was brisk and purposeful, although Marmén, like so many, swallowed the triplet in the opening theme as if it were a throwaway ornament rather than the main motif of the whole work. The second movement tripped along happily, with cellist Sinéad O'Halloran physically expressive, smiling and looking as if she were the MC. The Andantino offered a spiritual meditation, with fine expressive playing from violist Bryony Gibson-Cornish and Marmén. O'Halloren was to the fore again in the finale, with her expressive solo leading to urgent conversations and a joyful ending.

TIM HOMFRAY

VERONIKA EBERLE (VIOLIN) ADRIEN LA MARCA (VIOLA) QUIRINE VIERSEN (CELLO)

WIGMORE HALL 6 MARCH 2024

There was something of a paradox to this concert by Veronika Eberle and friends – robust and reliable though their playing was. In the outer movements of Beethoven's C minor String Trio op.9 no.3, the players worked too hard, leading to a hectic, breathless quality, even touching on the ferocious. Eberle's own sound also tended towards a flatter, edgier core, exacerbating the effect.

Roussel's String Trio (1937) was his last completed work, dedicated to the Trio Pasquier. It has a neo-Classical clarity but with less of the 20th-century flair exercised by Stravinsky, Poulenc and others. The busy counterpoint of the first two movements could have taken some relaxation but, by contrast, in the lighter texture of the finale, the players took the chance to shine.

With Mozart's Divertimento in E flat major K563, came the relief of more tonal variety, not least the welcome warmth of the Adagio and a spirited accented tumbling theme in the Minuet and Trio. There was surely more charm to be squeezed from the theme in the variation-form Andante, though the finale came with some light-hearted buoyancy. Overall, however, it wasn't clear the players were themselves altogether convinced by these pieces.

EDWARD BHESANIA

MUSIC OF THE ELEMENTS WITH PUPILS OF THE YEHUDI MENUHIN SCHOOL

KINGS PLACE 14 MARCH 2024

As music colleges have done for some years, the Yehudi Menuhin School (under music director Ashley Wass) also artistically curates programming across its concerts. This season's theme has been 'the elements', which figured in this Leavers' Concert. Seventeen students appeared in chamber groups or as soloists, and as many again formed the string orchestra for Max Richter's *Four Seasons Recomposed*.

The players in Cheryl Frances-Hoad's piano quintet *The Whole Earth Dances* drew out the contrast between episodes of sharp violence and unfurling tendrils (relating respectively to Ted Hughes's poems *Thistles* and *Ferns*); and there was notably sophisticated co-ordination between violinist Slavina Teneva and violist Clara-Sophia Wernig. Takemitsu's more abstract *Between Tides* is harder to bring off, but a different group of players conveyed its spare beauty.

After an atmospheric performance of three of Debussy's piano *Préludes*, arranged for guitar and four string instruments by Menuhin guitar professor Richard Wright, four soloists took turns to front Richter's *Four Seasons Recomposed*. Each of the soloists – Anna Zilberbord, Chloe Lui, Vadym Perig and Sasha Parker – played (and led) with great assurance. It was also heartening to hear four very distinctive musical personalities, as well as the energetic commitment of their fellow students in the string orchestra. The audience was naturally biased, but its enthusiastic applause was fully deserved.

EDWARD BHESANIA

JULIA FISCHER (VIOLIN) LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA/ EDWARD GARDNER

ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL 16 MARCH 2024

A disconcertingly eclectic programme from Eberle and friends

WIGMORE HALL TRUST 2024

Julia Fischer: powerful advocacy in Daniel Kidane's new concerto

As a one-time violinist with the Bruch and Mendelssohn concertos under his fingers, Daniel Kidane knows how to write for violin and orchestra from the inside. On the strength of this assured first performance, *Aloud* is that rare event among new violin concertos, staging an often violent and unpredictable battle between soloist and ensemble, in which neither side is cowed by the other.

The ostensible melodic premise is a Cossack folk song, reflecting Kidane's Russian and Ukrainian heritage on his father's side. A low-key, atmospheric opening, contracting and relaxing into violin recitatives, earns the right to the turmoil that occupies much of the opening movement. Along the way, Julia Fischer brought her trademark poise and even tone to a richly varied solo part, testing of technique, varied in dialogue with a large orchestra, and developing fragments of the folksong with a refreshing clarity of purpose.

A second movement initially promised soaring lyricism over a more subdued orchestral texture but delivered nervy, Bartókian tension, and left Fischer alone for a substantial cadenza. With the slightest hint of an up-beat, the music vanished, leaving behind an imaginary finale, like the Cheshire Cat's smile or the ghost of a hollow laugh, and the welcome sense that a second listening would shed light on its satisfyingly elusive form.

PETER QUANTRILL

ESTHER YOO (VIOLIN), BBC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA/CLEMENS SCHULDT

BARBICAN HALL 20 MARCH 2024

Seven years in the making, Raymond Yiu's Violin Concerto is a big piece in every sense. Themes of exile, loss and nostalgia place it in a lineage stretching back to Korngold and Bartók. For Yiu, born in Hong Kong, long resident in London, those themes take on new life and relevance through the turmoil of 20th-century Chinese history, and the life of the Chinese violinist Ma Sicong, as the soloist Esther Yoo outlined in a pre-premiere interview with *The Strad* (bit.ly/3TXJJg2).

Like the marital proverb, there is something old, something new, something borrowed and indeed something blue about the concerto's gradual awakening, giving Yoo plenty to dig her bow into, though the funky orchestration of the following scherzo periodically drowned her with its echoes of Cantonese pop. Where she came into her own was the solo third movement, a decorated transcription of an anonymous solo for erhu which draws deep on violinistic reserves of romantic expression, presenting an alluring showcase for any top-class violinist.

Where Yiu decisively breaks from tradition is the finale's journey – almost a concerto in itself – from Sibelian questing to a state of dissolved transcendence, via a fluid, often conflicting dialogue between both violin and orchestra and across European and Asian harmony. The BBCSO demonstrated their long expertise in taking on complex new scores, but Yiu's concerto is – perhaps unfashionably – soloist-driven. Yoo seized its lyrical opportunities with assurance, and if more extrovert accounts of the solo part were conceivable, second and third outings for the piece would be more than welcome.

PETER QUANTRILL

PIATTI QUARTET

KINGS PLACE 20 MARCH 2024

This early-evening concert provided a rare chance to hear music by Ina Boyle, a composer who rarely left her home town in Ireland, despite having studied with Vaughan Williams and having the support of fellow composers such as Elizabeth Maconchy. Boyle's E minor Quartet is a beautiful piece, certainly worthy of attention, although, as the Piatti Quartet's leader Michael Trainor said, even these musicians have had few chances to perform it live. The first of its three movements, Allegro moderato, shows some affinity to Vaughan Williams, mournful and not quite pentatonic, with open textures. The long lines of its Adagio were wonderfully sustained and nicely shaped, natural, understated and affecting. The short final Allegro molto was dancing and energetic.

For Dvořák's Second Piano Quintet they were joined by pianist Emmanuel Despax. After the winning beauty of cellist Jessie Ann Richardson in the opening theme, the group's playing was full of drama and colour, which could turn on an instant into caressed, limpid lyricism. The musicians skilfully negotiated the great musical patchwork of the 'Dumka', from fervent expression to easy-going song. The Scherzo was light and effervescent, and the finale drove onwards, with some sparkling staccato. This was a multifaceted performance of lightness, profundity, power and charm.

TIM HOMFRAY

COURTESY LPO

RECORDINGS

HIDDEN FLAME
BEACH Romance op.23 **BOULANGER** Three Pieces **ESMAIL** one word makes a sound **PARADIS** Sicilienne **SCHUMANN** Romances op.22 **STROHL** Grande Sonate Dramatique
Yoshika Masuda (cello)
HyeJin Kim (piano)
AVIE AV2653

Fine playing is undermined by a problematic recording

It should be a cause for celebration that none of these composers any longer counts as 'neglected'. On the other hand, Yoshika Masuda and HyeJin Kim thus come up against serious competition. The Romances of Beach and Clara Schumann were written with violin in mind, and the baritonal strain of Masuda's phrasing does not persuade me that they sit well on the cello. At the other end of the album, Nadia Boulanger makes the point for me: her cello-conceived Three Pieces spin their exquisite melodies more idiomatically even in the instrument's upper register.

The album's centrepiece in every way is Rita Strohl's tremendous sonata. She based it, in Lisztian fashion, on the story of the Roman general Titus, his love for Berenice and politically expedient rejection of her, as translated by Molière. The tale is told through both strong motivic association and heaving drama (mostly) contained within the bounds of symphonic sonata form. Masuda overcomes the work's considerable demands on stamina and agility, though I find him a touch impersonal compared to Edgar Moreau (Erato) and Sandra Lied Haga (Simax – see her perceptive piece on the sonata in *The Strad*'s April 2023 issue).

BENJAMIN EALOVEGA

Viktoria Mullova: endlessly inventive musicianship

For all Masuda's undoubted artistry, however, and Kim's restraint in handling a weighty piano part, they are undone by the studio acoustic, which contrives to be uncomfortably close, resonant and ill-defined all at once. The piano's bass register obtrudes even though the cellist is nearer the microphone, least helpfully so in Reena Esmail's six-minute, raga-like meditation. The sound is more satisfactory on headphones, but still congested when Strohl's sonata (not infrequently) gathers intensity.

PETER QUANTRILL

BEETHOVEN Violin Sonatas: no.1 in D major op.12 no.1, no.6 in A major op.30 no.1, no.8 in G major op.30 no.3
Viktoria Mullova (violin)
Alasdair Beatson (fortepiano)
SIGNUM SIGCD794

This winning duo stands out for its recreative flair

As in their previous album (reviewed in June 2021), Viktoria Mullova and Alasdair Beatson perform with a gut-strung 1750 Giovanni Guadagnini violin and reproduction Classical bow and a copy of an 1805 Walter fortepiano by Paul McNulty. Reading from Clive Brown's thorough 2020–21 Bärenreiter edition, they respond faithfully to Beethoven's detailed performance indications and reveal refreshing new insights regarding matters of phrasing, articulation and expression.

Their tempos for the slow movements are suitably flowing and their fast movements are spry and buoyant, but never rushed. Their dynamic range is especially striking, particularly in the first movement of op.30 no.3 and the dramatic *minore* variation of op.12 no.1's Andante; they are also well attuned to Beethoven's humorous touches in op.30 no.1's variations and op.30 no.3's high-spirited finale. The clarity

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and dexterity of Beatson's passagework in the outer movements of op.12 no.1 and in op.30 no.1's variations are compelling and Mullova's flexible bowing style elicits a wide spectrum of timbres, enhanced by subtle vibrato. Extempore ornamentation is added as appropriate, including a pleasing violin lead-in during the slow movement of op.30 no.1 and imaginative fortepiano embellishment in some of the repeats of op.12 no.1's variation movement.

These persuasive, finely balanced performances are clearly captured in close, warm sound.

ROBIN STOWELL

BEETHOVEN Violin Sonata no. 10 in G major op.96; Romance in F major op.50; **MOZART** Violin Concerto no.5 in A major K219: Allegro aperto **SPOHR** Violin Concerto in D minor op.55: Adagio; works by **Bach, Schumann** and **Tovey**
Marie Soldat, Adila Fachiri (violins) Donald Tovey, Otto Schulhof (pianos)
BIDDULPH 85044-2

An enticing snapshot of two towering violinists from the past

Three remarkable musicians influenced by Joseph Joachim are represented here. Violinist Marie Soldat (1863–1955), was close to both Brahms and Clara Schumann; Donald Francis Tovey (1875–1940), was a towering figure as pianist, conductor and musicologist; and violinist Adila Fachiri (1886–1962) was the eldest of the d'Arányi sisters.

The 1928 performance of Beethoven's G major Sonata by Fachiri and Tovey is an exploratory, expressive reading unlike the power and certainty of Busch–Serkin or

MORICETTE SCHLOSSER

Oistrakh–Oborin. The balance favours the piano, which accords with the composer's priority; and Biddulph append Tovey's spoken injunction to listeners to go back to the beginning to get the exposition repeat.

The set's filler, the Andante from Bach's BWV1015, features lovely trills from Fachiri, also heard in the Beethoven. On her own in 1925–6 she plays movements from the Partitas in B minor and E major with nice light and shade. Tovey's cogent 1935 conjectural completion of Contrapunctus XIV from *The Art of Fugue* is a splendid bonus.

Soldat's 1921 records find her in retirement, in full possession of her facility but, like Ysaÿe in 1912, no longer commanding the power once admired in Brahms's concerto. The main treasure is the Adagio from Spohr's D minor Concerto, niftily played – as a grandpupil of the composer, she knew his style as few have done.

Soldat also musters vigour and style for the opening movement of Mozart's K219, featuring the cadenza by her last teacher Joachim, and Beethoven's Second Romance. Schumann's *Abendlied* is sensitive but Bach's Air is a bit lugubrious. She is well accompanied by Otto Schulhof. Two solo Bach movements are missing their beginnings because the rare discs are chipped.

The CD is well presented, with Emma Irlam Briggs's painting of her violinist sister Agnes on the cover.

TULLY POTTER

BOULANGER Nocturne (arr.Spindler) **TCHAIKOVSKY** The Seasons: October (arr.Spindler) **TRAD** El cant dels ocells (Song of the Birds) (arr.Spindler) **VIVALDI** The Four Seasons op.8 nos.1–4

Luka Faulisi (violin) Orkiestra Historyczna/Martyna Pasturzka
SONY CLASSICAL 19658843872

Vivaldi's *Seasons* in a new setting proves a mixed bag

Luka Faulisi is undoubtedly a young virtuoso of high calibre, as evidenced by his debut disc *Aria* (reviewed in March 2023). This follow-up, in which he attempts to deromanticise his playing style in Vivaldi's F*our Seasons* and align it more with historical performance practices, takes him out of his comfort zone and only partially succeeds. Some of the bow strokes employed and the breakneck speeds with which he takes most of the fast sections of Vivaldi's concertos are more akin to his virtuoso leanings. Moreover, the gimmickry, percussive and other quasi-cinematic liberties that he and his colleagues utilise to reproduce some of the extra-musical content described in the sonnets accompanying Vivaldi's concertos seem totally incompatible with those deromanticising aims; contrarily, his extempore ornamentation is

Luka Faulisi: a *Four Seasons* high on virtuosity

somewhat restrained and unconvincing.

His inclusion, though, of additional repertoire with a focus largely on nature, does allow him to stand out among the plethora of *Four Seasons*. Faulisi's accounts of Matthias Spindler's skilful arrangements, sandwiched between each concerto, make for more agreeable listening. He gives a heartfelt reading of the lyrical Catalan melody *El cant dels ocells*, made famous by Casals, and exhibits lyrical sensibility in Tchaikovsky's melancholic 'October', even if a more relaxed rendition of Lili Boulanger's Nocturne might be desirable. Sony's engineering is exemplary.

ROBIN STOWELL

Trio Boccherini with producer Marion Schwebel: breathing life into Hungarian gems

DOHNÁNYI Serenade in C op.10 **KODÁLY** Intermezzo **LÁSZLÓ WEINER** Serenade **LEÓ WEINER** String Trio in G minor op.6

Trio Boccherini

BIS BIS2107

An established ensemble gives new voice to Hungarian string trios

Trio Boccherini, celebrating a decade together, offers strongly characterised performances of these four rewarding works, achieving flawless ensemble and a beautiful blend of sound.

Leó Weiner, Kodály and Dohnányi all contributed to the forging of a new Hungarian national style. The clearly defined textures of Weiner's youthful 1908 Trio are immediately arresting, aided by a surround sound of glowing clarity. The tightness of the Boccherini's ensemble is evident in the vigorous syncopated rhythms of the Vivace movement.

Kodály's 1905 Intermezzo is a chamber music gem. There is some beautifully delicate playing from violinist Suyeon Kang and violist Vicki Powell and a touching ending as the little procession goes off jauntily into the distance.

In Dohnányi's five-movement Serenade, a masterpiece of string trio writing, the players relish the many contrasts in texture and take the skittering fugue in its central Scherzo at a virtuosic pace.

The as-yet unpublished Serenade (1938) by László Weiner, a pupil of Kodály who perished in the Holocaust, is a striking addition to the repertoire, the outer movements densely motivic, and the central Adagio full of restrained emotion.

JANET BANKS

HAYDN Six String Quartets op.1

Leipzig Quartet

MDG 307 231-2 (2CDS)

Plenty of revelations as this compelling survey reaches volume 17

There is a temptation not to take these pieces too seriously, led both by their conventional designation as 'divertimenti' and by the opus number that encourages us to think of them as apprentice pieces. Haydn was nonetheless in his early twenties when he wrote them, with 15 years of solid musical education behind him, including a schooling from the Neapolitan composer Porpora, which he regarded as fundamental to his development.

In any case, the Leipzig Quartet lays to rest any notion of immaturity or naïveté in these pieces. Radiance and pathos alike are potently distilled by Stefan Arzberger's first violin in the Adagio of op.1 no.1. The following Minuet is no less immediately and uniquely Haydnesque than any mature examples of his mastery; the Leipzig brings a 21st-century, urban edge to its rustic portamento and clumping Trio.

Indeed, one of the particular glories of op.1 is its generosity with minuets – two per quartet – and the Leipzig reveals the individual personality of each one, showing that Haydn could use the form as a character sketch no less deftly than the French harpsichordists in their *pièces de clavecin*. MDG's typically immaculate recording underpins their gentle gait with plenty of Peter Bruns's cello; I especially like the contrast between the dewy innocence

of no.6's first minuet and the foxy stealth of the second. Between them, the Adagio is almost whispered into the listener's ear; but the album is full of such treasures, as any Haydn collection deserves to be.

PETER QUANTRILL

HAYDN Complete Piano Trios vol. 3: nos.12, 19, 25 and 43
ARMSTRONG Revêtements
Trio Gaspard
CHANDOS CHAN20279

Plenty to delight in this infectious Haydn trio survey

Trio Gaspard (see Piano Trios feature, page 46) continues its survey of the complete Haydn piano trios with a third volume that bears out the high standards of the first two. As before, the selection is designed simply to work as a satisfyingly contrasting programme, rather than being chronologically arranged. Also as before, the trio has commissioned a short complementary new work, this time from Los Angeles-born pianist and composer Kit Armstrong.

The Trio in F major (no.19) makes an ideal opener, with Trio Gaspard imprinting the first of the work's two movements with impeccable balance, along with a precision that nevertheless doesn't come across as self-consciously crisp. The slow movements are elegantly turned, while the Polonaise of no.12 in E flat major is neatly sprung.

The recording is not especially lively, which invites us to interrogate forensically the apparently flawless playing. Pianist Nicholas Rimmer uses practically no pedal and the string playing can be terrifically light and deft, though there are some eye-opening accents in the *minore* section of no.43's middle movement.

Armstrong's *Revêtements* borrows its title from topology. While giving all players a workout, it also neatly uses ideas from Haydn, most obviously the skipping theme of the Presto from no.43.

EDWARD BHESANIA

DE MANZIARLY Piano Trio; Nocturne; Dialogue; Violin Sonata; Trilogue
Cecilia Zilliacus (violin) Kati Raitinen (cello) Bengt Forsberg, Peter Johansson (pianos)
BIS BIS2689

The music of a forgotten Boulanger pupil is resurrected, to striking effect

The French composer Marcelle de Manziarly (1899–1989), one-time pupil of Nadia Boulanger, was fêted in her day but then fell into obscurity. Of the five works on this CD, only one, the Piano Trio, has been published. It dates from 1921 and inhabits the French sound world of its time. In the first of its four movements violinist Cecilia Zilliacus and cellist Kati Raitinen sensuously weave their separate ways, and in the short second-movement 'Rapide' they are vigorous and rhythmically vital. Their playing of the slow-moving lines of the third movement

Subtlety and beauty from Cecilia Zilliacus

TINA AXELSSON

is pliant, imbued with mystery and full of subtle colours, and the finale has fine lyrical sensitivity before its vigorous ending.

The other major work here is the Violin Sonata of 1918. Zilliacus brings subtlety and limpid beauty to its long melodies and shows similar sensitivity in the quietly contemplative second movement, 'Lent et Grave'. The third is marked 'Tumultueux', an effect found mostly in the piano part, splendidly played by Bengt Forsberg, who is superb in every piece he plays, although often rather in the background.

The other works here are later: while the Nocturne for violin and piano (1977) is in Manziarly's earlier style, *Dialogue* (1970) for cello and piano and *Trilogue* (1977) for piano trio are dissonant and fragmented. They are all played with passion and authority.

TIM HOMFRAY

SCHUMANN Piano Trios: no.1 in D minor, no.2 in F major
Trio Ilona
DEUX-ELLES DXL1197

A notable debut from a period-aware trio

Schumann's piano trios long remained hidden gems of his output. Over the past quarter of a century or so, though, they have belatedly moved to the heart of the trio repertoire. Period-instrument players also approached them warily until the supergroup of Isabelle Faust, Jean-Guihen Queyras and Alexander Melnikov made benchmark recordings a decade ago.

Trio Ilona has chosen the first two trios for its recording debut. The piano played by Yi-Heng Yang is an appropriate 1830 Streicher but the booklet doesn't reveal the identities of Ravenna Lipchik's violin or Kate Bennett Wadsworth's cello.

Techniques, though, are audibly well-researched and discussed in the booklet, and include a range of expressive string portamentos and the admission of those 'ghost notes' that emanate during the changing of hand position. While the Streicher is a vibrant, resonant presence, the effect is of the string instruments' individual voices being coaxed rather than declaimed. It's fascinating, and if Faust et al remain perhaps the more imaginative and responsive interpreters, there is much to be gained from the Ilona's occasionally less polished traversal.

The ensemble takes its name from Ilona Eibenschütz, a pupil of Clara Schumann's who lived until 1967, representing a real link from the age of recording to the height of the Romantic era. The studio is Robert King's Alpheton New Maltings in the Suffolk countryside, which easily accommodates the Streicher but is kinder to the cello than to the violin, most noticeably in the First Trio. It will be fascinating to hear the ways in which the Ilona's approach illuminates the elusive Third Trio.

DAVID THREASHER

SCHUMANN Piano Quintet in E flat major op.44 **TANEYEV** Piano Quintet in G minor op.30

Sacconi Quartet, Peter Donohoe (piano)

SIGNUM SIGCD775

A Russian rarity is a winner in this unusual pairing

The Sacconi Quartet and Peter Donohoe fulfilled a cherished desire to perform Taneyev's Piano Quintet on a tour taking in Moscow and Siberia in 2019–20, and this recording was made later in 2020, as pandemic restrictions began to be loosened. It's a truly thrilling work on the grandest scale, and if it's heard less often than other similar works, that's likely down to the sheer technical challenges it presents to the performers.

Donohoe is right at home in this repertoire, and the Sacconi is with him all the way, whether in its expressive playing in the introduction, the playfulness of the Scherzo or the intensity of the passacaglia-form Largo. The finale reaches its denouement in a hard-won G major, which feels truly earned after the intricacy of the arguments leading up to it. If the rich acoustic of the Menuhin Hall sometimes reveals some slightly harsh playing in extreme high registers, arguably that's as much Taneyev's fault as anybody's. This is a reading that offers a complementary view to the benchmark-setting recording by Pletnev with an all-star quartet (DG).

The coupling is Schumann's chamber masterpiece of 1842. Donohoe and the Sacconi seem to bring Taneyev's furrowed-brow darkness to the Schumann, often blocking out the sunshine found in other performances. Passages such as the scalic play of the Scherzo seem to prize efficiency over sparkle: absent is a sensitivity to the range of colours that illuminate the composer's quicksilver mood changes, and the magnificent contrapuntal writing that crowns the finale never quite reaches boiling point. Never mind: there are plenty of Schumann quintets to choose from on disc, but the Taneyev is a far rarer bird, and a joy to hear.

DAVID THREASHER

Masterly Shostakovich from Quatuor Danel

SHOSTAKOVICH String Quartets nos.1–15, Two Pieces for String Quartet; Quartet Movement

Quatuor Danel

ACCENTUS ACC80585 (6 CDS)

A powerful new live cycle from these Shostakovich veterans

Artistic endeavour never lies still. Nearly 20 years ago the Quatuor Danel made what is widely regarded as a benchmark recorded cycle of the complete Shostakovich quartets. But ideas evolve, and this latest set sees two new members in the lower strings in a brilliantly vivid live recording given in the Mendelssohn Hall of the Leipzig Gewandhaus.

MARCO BORGGREVE

Traversing these works is a demanding process, reflecting Shostakovich's own trials and tribulations. Spanning 36 years, their stylistic and harmonic journey is perceptively interpreted here. The innocence of the lyrical C major First Quartet forms a savage contrast to the death knell of the Fifteenth Quartet, where the life blood drains away. In between, we have a vivid range of emotions, mainly hovering around darker hues. Small wonder, then, that Shostakovich's compositions had been proscribed by Stalin. Having survived a brutal world war, endured Leningrad in the terrible siege; and worried through endless political intrigues, Shostakovich generates the full depiction of anxiety by leaning on the interval of semitones to camouflage a sense of key. Metre is flexible, which also reflects unsettled sensations.

Shostakovich frequently alludes to Jewish folk music, its sense of suffering and layered meaning mirroring his own struggles. In the Fourth Quartet the players give the almost grotesque klezmer effects full sway in the work's finale before allowing the music to melt into a ghostly close. The Danel brings a vast range of instrumental colour to Shostakovich's sound world, using deep sonorous tones one minute and non-vibrato the next, while some of the notes are barely audible. It observes the letter and spirit of the score with laudable accuracy, and handles swift-changing tempos with absolute mastery.

Schooled and nurtured by both the Borodin and Beethoven quartets, the Danel has inherited their performing legacy yet adds its own voice. Its players also understand Shostakovich's structures which, although cast in traditional forms of sonata, fugatos, Beethovenian motivic development and passacaglias, are at the same time free and exploratory. The new shakes hands with tradition, and the Danel is alert to this, its surgically precise textures allowing the listener to hear these ideas clearly. There are parts of the writing, such as in the opening movements of Quartets nos.8 and 15, where the influence of Renaissance music is clearly evident. Here, the Danel sculpts the sense of tension and resolution very effectively.

As the cycle progresses, Shostakovich's style becomes more probing. By the Twelfth Quartet, he is adopting 12-note melodies, though ones that still retain a semblance of tonality. Metre is now freer, and string techniques more textural, with frequent trills, glissandos, Bartókian pizzicatos and screaming dissonance with angular edgy chords: the Allegretto furioso second movement of the Tenth Quartet a good case in point. Here the Danel generates a visceral power with searingly strong bow strokes. Dynamics become extreme, nowhere more so than in the macabre Serenade of the Fifteenth Quartet, depicted here with razor-sharp intensity. Shostakovich is uncompromising, no longer needing to curry favour. The C major section of the Elegy (the first of the Two Pieces), embedded within an overall landscape of E flat minor, hails back to the First Quartet's innocent lines, while allowing the later movements to outline a sense of finality. The journey is complete.

JOANNE TALBOT

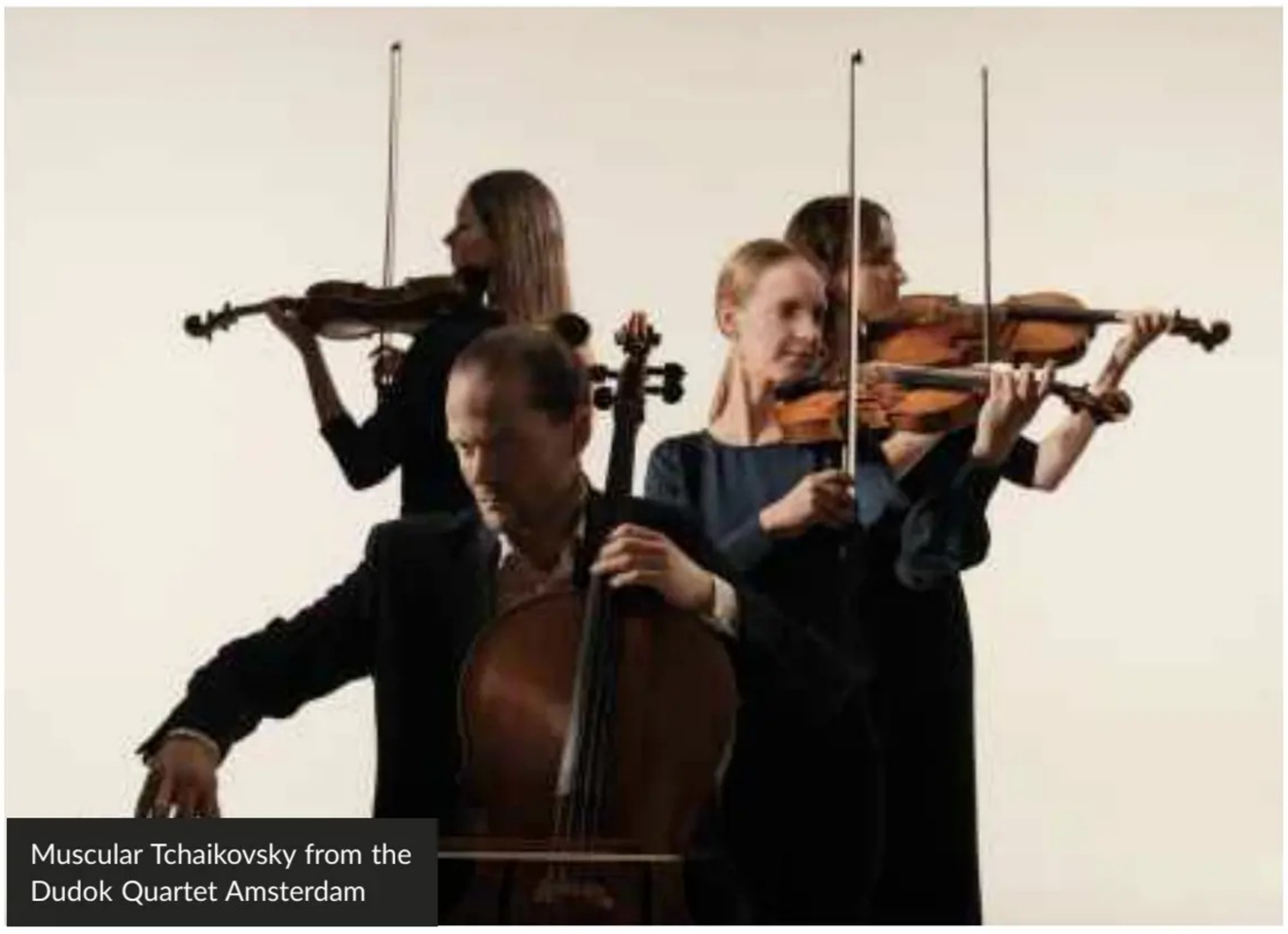
TCHAIKOVSKY String Quartets vol.1: no.1 in D major op.11, no.2 in F major op.22; Eugene Onegin: Lensky's Aria (arr.David Faber)

Dudok Quartet Amsterdam

RUBICON CLASSICS RCD1103

No lack of character but occasional deviations from the score

The opening movement of Tchaikovsky's First String Quartet flows along nicely, but a persistent feature of the recording soon appears: when cellist David Faber takes the melody in the exposition, the semiquavers of first violinist Judith



Muscular Tchaikovsky from the Dudok Quartet Amsterdam

GREEN ROOM CREATIVES/YURI ANDRIES

van Driel all but disappear. Still, Driel makes up for it with her neatly executed semiquavers in the development. The famous Andante cantabile is simply and effectively played, with some judicious portamento in the central section. The Scherzo is sturdy, rustic stuff, with biting accents and crisp staccatos, but the Dudok dynamics are not the same as Tchaikovsky's, and his *diminuendo sin al fine* just doesn't happen. In the finale, the solos in the viola and cello again come firmly to the fore as their colleagues recede.

The Dudok players make the most of the chromatic dissonances at the opening of the Second Quartet, and Driel plays her recitative with passion and flair, and there is tender playing to come after the energetic scrubbing, and a heroic, muscular climax. They are delicate in the quixotic scherzo, with its quirky time signature, and there is gentle good humour in the central L'istesso tempo. The Andante has an easy grace until Tchaikovsky ratchets up the power, and the finale is equally genial, with clear textures in the fugue. The recording is close and warm.

TIM HOMFRAY

AVS PRESENTS: 2023 – UNDERREPRESENTED COMPOSERS

Works by **Behrend, de Biase Bidart, Clearfield, Esmail, Mansurian, Montgomery, Taaffe Zwilich** and **Toni Fábio Saggin, Jacob Adams, Sheila Browne, Alyssa Warcup, Mary Moran, Rafael Videira, Vijay Chalasani (violas) Mauren Frey, Paul Lee, Julie Nishimura (pianos) Tallā Rouge Duo**

AVS PRESENTS AMERICANVIOLASOCIETY.ORG

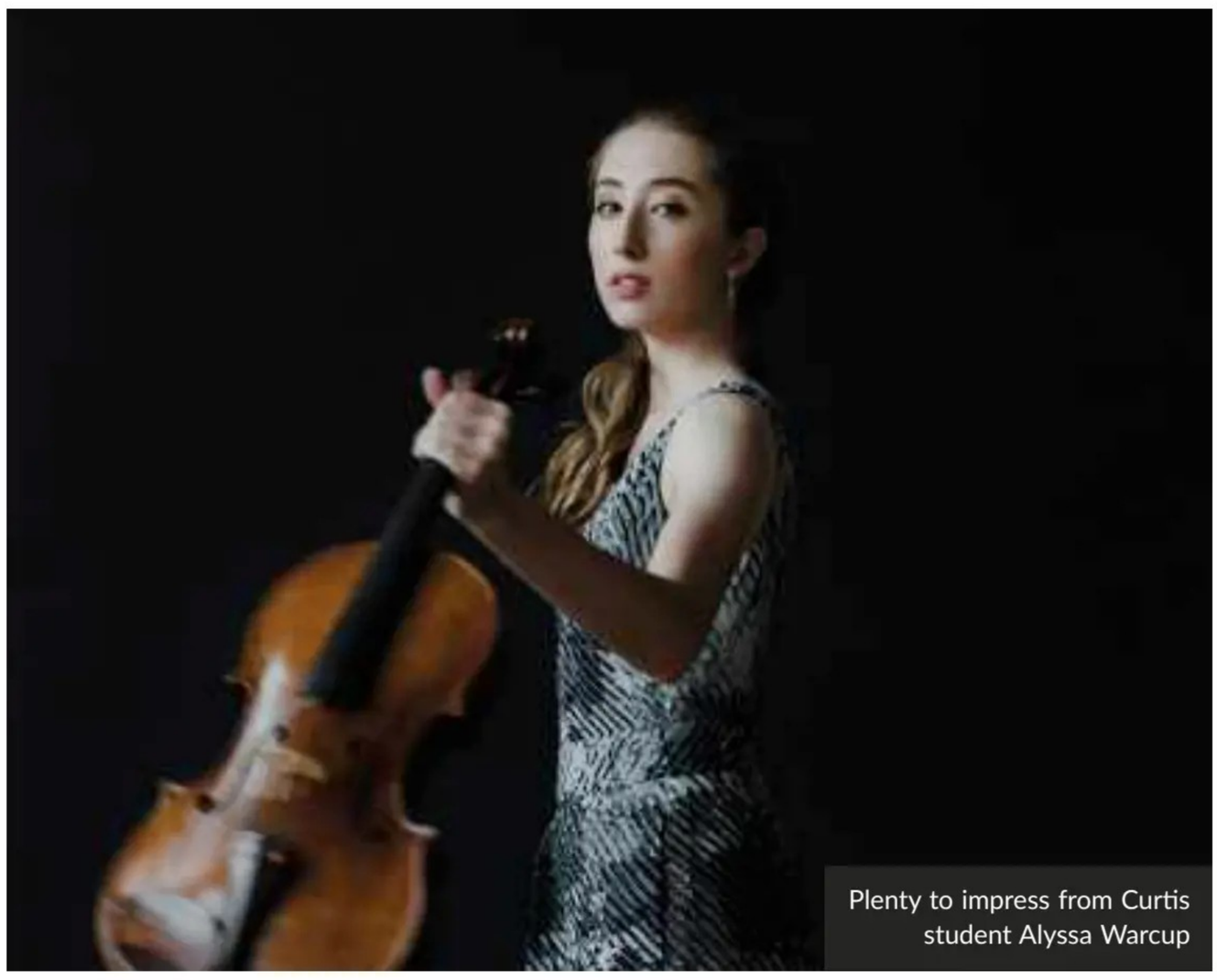
This second volume shines a light on viola rarities

It's been ten years since the American Viola Society published its first self-produced CD, compiling American viola music from as long ago as 1906. Relaunched as AVS Presents, the label aims to release an annual CD, of which this is the first. Just what makes a composer underrepresented might be open to discussion (there's a Pulitzer Prize winner here), but certainly none of those included can be said to be overexposed. Although there's only space to mention selected highlights, all this music deserves to become better known.

The Brazilian Lycia de Biase Bidart obviously possessed a rare melodic gift, and of course one's heart goes out to a piece called *Viola from Heaven*! This beautiful morsel from 1969, charmingly etched by Fábio Saggin and Mauren Frey, makes for an uplifting start to proceedings. Perhaps inevitably, a certain amount of elegiac music is on the bill of fare, but Jeanne Behrend's 1944 *Lamentation*, written in memory of her cousin, killed in action in the Second World War, packs a tremendous emotional punch as performed by Jacob Adams and Paul Lee. Andrea Clearfield's *Convergence* (2008) is a tough nut to crack, but Sheila Browne and Julie Nishimura command one's attention in a reading of compelling authority that makes light of some unconventional writing. Curtis Institute student Alyssa Warcup shows her considerable mettle in Jessie Montgomery's Ysaÿe-inspired Rhapsody no.1.

Each track was recorded in a different venue, making for variable but always favourable acoustics, and concise notes help put each piece into context.

CARLOS MARÍA SOLARE



Plenty to impress from Curtis student Alyssa Warcup

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AYAKA SANO

Fenella Humphreys: constantly exploring

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Fenella Humphreys (violin)

RUBICON RCD1127

An ambitiously wide-ranging album demands a charismatic player

A quartet based in Maine, US, the Pine Tree Flyers is clearly on an important mission: to highlight and establish New England fiddle music alongside its more prominent stylistic counterparts as a rich, rewarding concert music. Indeed, its debut release unapologetically sets out its musical stall, and the result is a revealing, rewarding and deeply enjoyable experience in its mix of tunes and styles, and – most evidently – in the players' inventive, ever-changing arrangements across their quartet of fiddle, accordion, piano and guitar.

Katie McNally's fine, precise fiddling often takes the melodic lead, amid the bristling energy of the opening trio of tunes 'Lady of the Lake'/'Lady Walpole'/'Lady Ann Montgomery', for example. It's a joy to listen to: smooth, fluid and with an unfussy agility to it, though never lacking in character.

McNally often shares melodic duties with accordionist Emily Troll – the two women almost vie for attention in the breezy 'Smith's Reel'/'Pointe-au-pic'. Guitarist Owen Marshall and pianist Neil Pearlman are hardly relegated to chugging accompaniments, however: Marshall takes melodic lead in 'Echoes of Scotty O'Neil' against chiming interjections from Pearlman, and it's almost as if McNally's shadowy fiddle line is accompanying Pearlman's bright piano in 'Shadows on the Lawn'.

It's clear that the Pine Tree Flyers has plenty to say about its myriad traditions, as well as the technical prowess and musical insights to say it boldly and inventively. That noted, however, despite a few unexpected harmonic twists and unusual tune reimaginings, an obvious respect for tradition runs deeply through the release.

DAVID KETTLE

GARETH BARTON

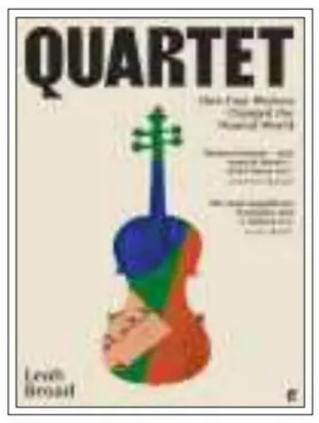
Lockdown clearly still casts a long shadow. Though British violinist Fenella Humphreys doesn't namecheck the pandemic directly in this eclectic collection of solo works, the disc's inspiration, she explains, came from a desire to keep alive the music she'd arranged, discovered or had written for her in the spring of 2020. It's a thoroughly laudable aim, especially when those unsettling circumstances gave rise (in one way or another) to exquisite musical miniatures such as Sarah Lianne Lewis's achingly poignant *Apart we are not alone* and *Together Apart*, or the airborne acrobatics of Ailie Robertson's lyrical, hen harrier-inspired *Skydance*.

Among discoveries or rediscoveries are George Walker's bluesy, angular *Bleu*, which Humphreys attacks with requisite character, and Cyril Scott's deeply evocative *Idyll*, which blends slow-moving melodies and frenetic movement in music that at times seems to pay overt tribute to Vaughan Williams's lark.

Add to those solo-violin arrangements – Humphreys's own version of Debussy's 'La fille aux cheveux de lin' is particularly effective in its quiet passion and rhapsodic freedom – and you have a disc that, with its 23 brief tracks across styles and genres, feels at times dangerously more akin to a shuffled solo-violin playlist than to a curated succession of musical works.

However, that is offset by Humphreys's direct, deeply communicative playing, which has a focused, sometimes reedy tone and an easy sense of airy agility that frequently brings her repertoire vividly alive, however bewilderingly diverse.

DAVID KETTLE



Quartet: How Four Women Changed the Musical World
Leah Broad

480PP ISBN 9780571366101

FABER & FABER £20

The Quartet of Leah Broad's title is not a female chamber ensemble but a cobbled-together group of British women composers who had relatively little in common, as far as I can see: Ethel Smyth (1858–1944), Rebecca Clarke (1886–1979), Dorothy Howell (1898–1982) and Doreen Carwithen (1922–2003).

Normally when reviewing a book, I fill about a quarter of an A4 sheet with notes; if I tell you that on this occasion I filled almost a whole sheet, you will gather that this tome has caused me some disquiet. Two major irritations come from Broad's clumsy interleaving of the four lives and her use of 'Ethel', 'Rebecca', 'Dorothy' and 'Doreen' for her subjects. Henry Wood even gets referred to as 'Henry' most of the time. Would Ms Broad expect me to call her 'Leah' in this review?

To be positive, I think she gets Ethel Smyth right to a great extent and the book can be recommended as a latter-day view of this great composer and battler for women's rights. She is also very good on the last phase of Rebecca Clarke's life, when she found happiness with the pianist and composer James Friskin.

She does not persuade me that Howell was more than very small beer as a creative artist, although no doubt an admirable human being. And about Carwithen, whom I knew as Mary Alwyn, there is a consistent undercurrent suggesting that her talent was repressed by the great love of her life, William Alwyn. In truth, the first time I met the Alwyns he was at pains to stress that Mary was also a fine composer; and she willingly gave her energies to propagating his music, before and after his death.

Broad seems uncertain of her target audience. Do we need to have 'libretto', 'in nomine', 'boatswain', Gilbert and Sullivan, *The Dream of Gerontius*, Tallis and Bechstein explained to us? She writes of 'a choral Mass'. The paragraph about Elgar on page 134 is grotesque. She writes of 'a pianist called Kathleen Long' and 'a conductor called Dan Godfrey' – both were well known – and has America entering the Great War in 1918, also mixing up the V1 and V2 in World War II.

The writing is often poor. The words disinterest, wracked, lollop and becalmed are misused. We get 'hinges around', 'pedestalised', 'ostracisation', 'educationalist' and 'workshopped'. Mills and Boon-style drivel abounds. We first meet Howell, aged seven, kneeling 'on the cool flagstone floor of St Francis's Catholic Church' – I spent hours of my childhood kneeling on Roman Catholic church floors and it was dashed uncomfortable.

Instead of what she obviously thinks is 'fine writing', she could have told us more about the musicians who performed her subjects' music. She even describes people without naming them. In 1920 Clarke miraculously plays her Viola Sonata on her own in New York (in reality the distinguished Scots pianist Winifred Christie partnered her). No mention is made of Clarke's only recording – a fine Mozart 'Kegelstatt' Trio with Long and Frederick Thurston – or of Aubrey Brain, for whom the horn part in Smyth's superb 1927 Double Concerto was specifically designed.

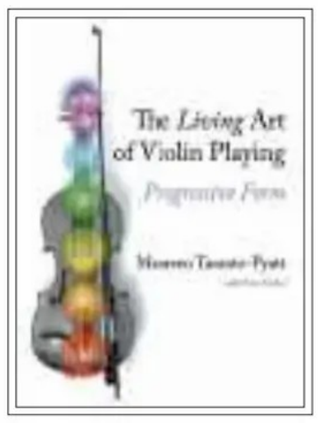
Try as I may, I cannot see Howell, Carwithen or even Clarke as world changers, despite their various virtues. Ethel Smyth is a different matter and, praise be, she has now emerged from the dip in interest that usually follows a composer's death (Chopin is the sole exception

Doreen Carwithen

Dorothy Howell

Ethel Smyth

Rebecca Clarke



I can think of). The book is nicely produced and illustrated, with an index and a select discography of the four women's music.

TULLY POTTER

The Living Art of Violin Playing: Progressive Form

Maureen Taranto-Pyatt, Peter Stickel

340PP ISBN 9780253066602

INDIANA UNIVERSITY PRESS $80

The Living Art of Violin Playing is a detailed account of what its author, violinist Maureen Taranto-Pyatt, terms Progressive Form: 'a system that can be used both as a reference for individual issues or as a guide to a revamping of technique'. Developed over the course of many years of study and self-reflection, and honed over years of working with others, this system was born from the desire of the adult violinist to regain 'magical movement' – the youthful ease and naturalness with which she first approached the instrument.

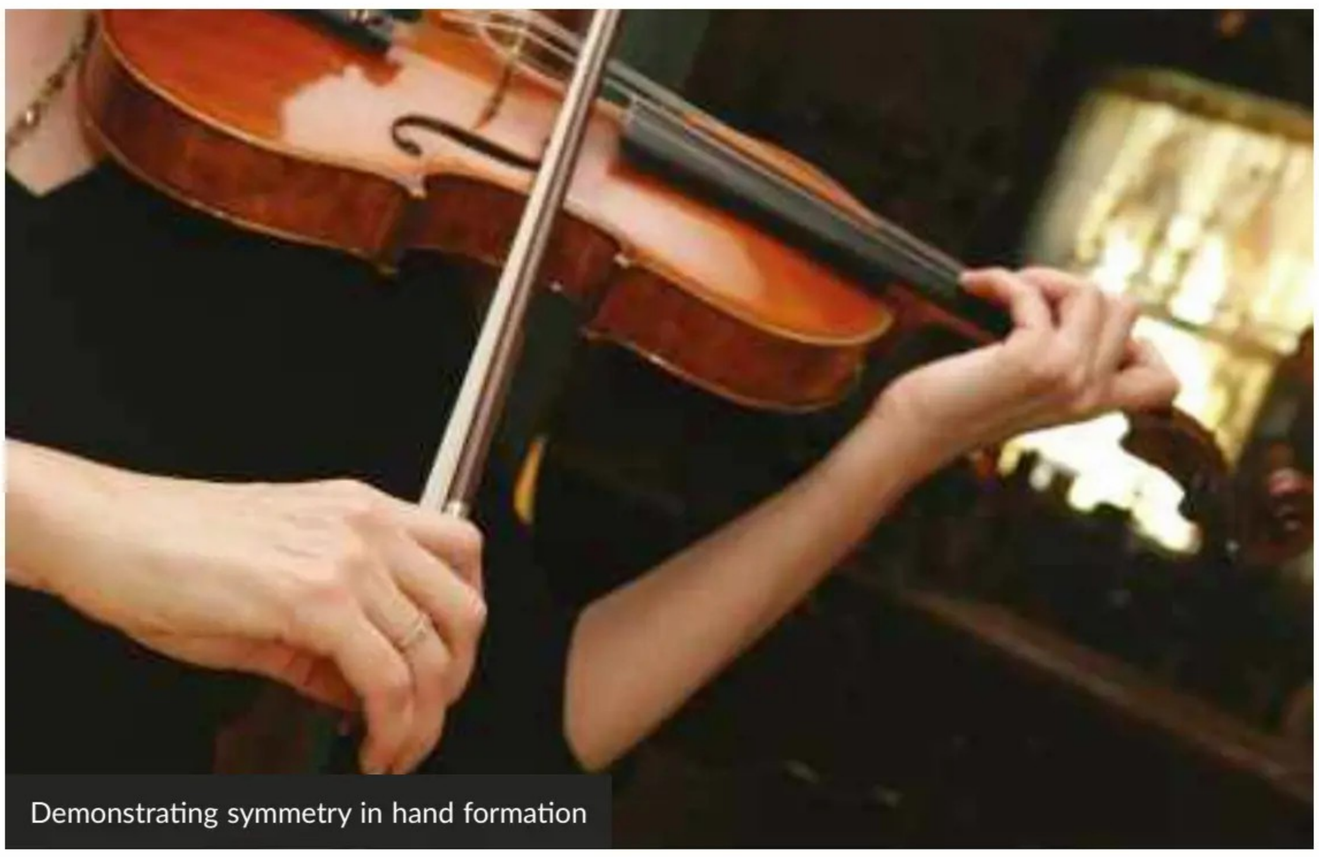
Having studied with Victor Romanul and Max Hobart, Taranto-Pyatt also acknowledges the deep influence of the works of Carl Flesch, Yehudi Menuhin and, perhaps most strongly, Ivan Galamian. Her thesis is supported not only by deep knowledge of anatomy and physiology, but also of the technical barriers that can creep in, and indeed become entrenched in the course of a life in music. The fact that the author is a poet as well as a musician resonates throughout the book, with a continual stream of lively metaphors and vivid descriptions shedding light on the complex business of organising the human anatomy around what can be at times the most awkward of instruments.

Those coming to the book with the author's first intent in mind – i.e. to tackle a specific technique that is holding back their musical progress, or preventing them from realising their musical intentions – will typically find first a clear description of the movement required accompanied by either a visual image or creative visualisation. Those coming to it as a resource with which to spend a good deal of time, looking to develop technique methodically, will find much food for thought. It will require, as the author acknowledges in the preface, 'serious study'. Both types of reader will undoubtedly gain greater kinaesthetic understanding of their own bodies in relation to violin playing and, further, stand to gain powerful insight into issues that could be holding them back.

The book is a very handsome volume, printed on high-quality paper in an elegant serif font, which indicates seriousness. The one feature which is a little out of step is the black-and-white photos that illustrate the author's points throughout. These usefully complement the written text, illuminating the lucid explanations with physical examples: however they are sometimes a little dark, and small, to see with complete clarity what is going on.

In search of balance, harmony and the liberation to be gained by eliminating unnecessary tension, the author also acknowledges the psychological, even spiritual issues, that may underlie problems with tension or poor body alignment more generally. This only serves to reinforce the impression that this book has been written with great empathy, the product of years of self-scrutiny and the desire to share with others the results of deep thought, reflection and wisdom.

PHILIPPA BUNTING



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Violin Junior is a new set of method books by Ros Stephen, author of the popular *Globetrotters* series. Aimed at the younger learner, the books offer a thorough introduction to violin playing which is both child-friendly and also meticulously rigorous. Two levels of the series are currently available, taking the student from complete beginner through all the keys and techniques normally expected by around Grade 2; a further three levels are promised. As one would expect from a 21st-century series, a wealth of supplementary online material is offered, including demo and play-along audio tracks, along with a comprehensive series of mini-tutorial-style videos that highlight and explain the main teaching points of each section. As well as a 'lesson book' (for which piano and violin accompaniment books are available separately), each level has separate theory and concert books.

The volumes themselves are very well produced. The staves are large and easy to read, and the pages are full of tasteful colour drawings, which illustrate techniques and complement the written tips through the use of

Ros Stephen

imagery, as well as adding a sprinkle of fun. And much as I'm not normally a big fan of cartoon characters, I must admit to having developed rather a weakness for Fiocco the Frog, with his garish pink jacket, endearing facial expressions and main character vibes, not to mention his pals, who include Marvin the Mouse (don't squash him!) and some great dragons and other assorted creatures.

The lesson books are carefully structured – every piece has an obvious main teaching purpose and builds on previously covered techniques. Book 1 follows the usual model of introducing fingered notes one at a time, which may not suit all teachers but is nevertheless consistent with the general principle of introducing only one new technique at a time. The musical language used is reasonably varied, though the majority of tunes lean towards a calm and pleasant style rather than anything more upbeat. Many of the tunes are presented as songs with words, which occasionally makes the pages feel a little busy. Throughout the books, as well as learning short accompanied pieces, the students are offered a variety of engaging activities, such as improvisation, transposition and composition exercises, as well as a smattering of micro studies focusing on specific techniques. The overall result is a very well-balanced mixture of serious technique and fun creativity.

The majority of the pieces in the lesson books are beautifully short, with the concert book offering longer pieces to provide extension and consolidation material as well as performance possibilities. The piano accompaniments are very accessible, if not terribly harmonically adventurous, and violin accompaniments are also included. While there are not many of what my students would call 'bangers', some of the author's original compositions come close, especially my personal favourites *Bus Stop Jig* and *Disco Beats*.

The theory books for each level are full of violin-centric interactive exercises and games, and although there are clear links with the material covered in the lesson books, they can be worked through at the child's own pace rather than in strict synchronisation with the lesson books. Audio content is included, as are downloadable solutions to some of the tasks, and even a selection of manuscript paper in different font sizes.

This well-thought-out, holistic series is precisely what self-described 'non-musical' parents have been demanding for years. The books are systematic and full of comprehensible and relevant information, and the online videos provide clear, calm instructions that will empower non-string-playing parents to help their young players at home. I imagine that it will become a favourite resource for many teachers and parents in the years to come, and I look forward to seeing the rest of the series as it becomes available.

CELIA COBB

Classifieds

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From the ARCHIVE

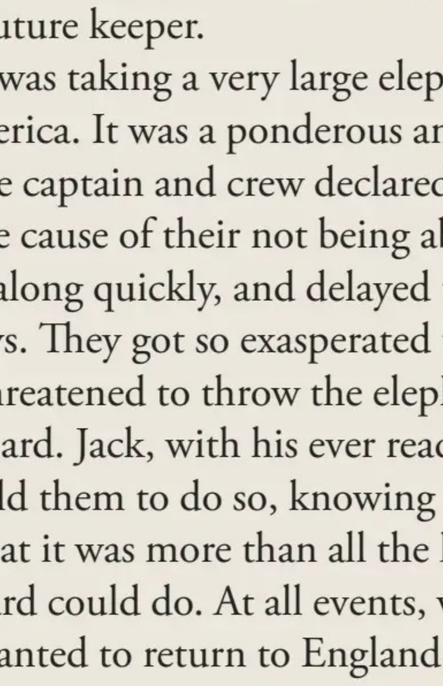
FROM THE STRAD JUNE 1904 VOL.15 NO.170

Violinist Archie Easton presents some 'reminiscences of John Frederick Lott' (1804–70), including his brief spell as an elephant trainer for a circus

Jack Lott was taught violin making by his father. He was allowed one day in the week to work for himself, which he used to do and to a good purpose often, as the following will show. He made two violins and thought he would try and sell them. He showed them to his father and told him he was going to take them to a sale, and see what he could get for them. His father was indignant, and told him he was doing a foolish thing, and would not get anything for such badly made fiddles! However, Jack, never daunted, put his fiddles into two old cases, and took them to the sale room. After two or three days, to his great surprise he was told that they had fetched £30 each. When he was asked how he would take the money, in notes or in gold, he said he preferred gold! He filled both his trouser pockets, and went home to tell his father of his good fortune. When he emptied his pockets on to the bench, and his father saw the sixty sovereigns, he asked Jack whom he had been robbing, but Jack explained that the two dirty old fiddles he had made had fetched the amount on the bench.

After working with his father, Jack thought he would like to travel, and meeting with a travelling circus manager, who was wanting a keeper for one of his elephants, offered himself for that post. Not having had any previous experience with elephants, Jack thought he would like to get used to the animal before its present keeper left, so he asked if he might be allowed to make up a bed the other side of the keeper, and sleep a night or two, so that the elephant might get used to him. The animal, evidently, knew there was a stranger the other side of its keeper, and waited for an opportunity to disturb Jack from his sleep, which it successfully did by quietly putting its trunk over its keeper's bed and lifting Jack and his bed up in the air! Jack, however, stuck to his bed night after night, until the elephant became quite used to him, and willing to accept him as its future keeper.

He was taking a very large elephant to America. It was a ponderous animal, and the captain and crew declared it was the cause of their not being able to get along quickly, and delayed them for days. They got so exasperated that they threatened to throw the elephant overboard. Jack, with his ever ready wit, told them to do so, knowing full well that it was more than all the hands on board could do. At all events, when Jack wanted to return to England, the captain had his revenge, for he positively refused under any conditions to bring him home if he wished to bring the elephant with him. ●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A student of Joachim, he wrote the method book *Modern Violin Playing* despite a tragic accident during World War I

Serge Koussevitzky
We mark the 150th anniversary of the great double bassist's birth with a look at his life and career

Bass-bar acoustics
Joseph Curtin presents the results of experiments performed at the 2023 Oberlin workshops

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In Focus
A 1969 violin by Gio Batta Morassi

Session Report
The Takács Quartet on Schubert

Sentimental *Work*

ANDRÉS CÁRDENES

The Cuban-born violinist feels a rapport with the opulence of Chausson's *Poème* – particularly with the revisions by its dedicatee, Eugène Ysaÿe

I first started learning Chausson's *Poème* when I was nine years old. I'd heard the Heifetz recording and I immediately fell in love with the piece; I felt as though it spoke to me, and I'm naturally drawn to the romantic style of playing it requires. I've played it many times in my career and I have to separate it from myself when I'm on stage, because there's a danger of smothering it with emotion. I have to remind myself not to get too involved.

Chausson wrote the *Poème* in 1896 and to me it embodies the thick and opulent French romantic writing he was so well known for. At the time, Paris was being redesigned, the boulevards became wider and grander, and there was a tremendous sense of French culture; Chausson was friends with Fauré and Debussy, and of course Eugène Ysaÿe, for whom he wrote the *Poème*. Ysaÿe is part of my direct lineage, in that he taught Josef Gingold who was my tutor at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music. Although I'd been playing the *Poème* in high school, I never really progressed with it until I began studying with Mr Gingold; he was able to bring to light so many intricate details, particularly around the revisions that Ysaÿe made.

For instance, the original version has some awkward jumps from the G to the E string, which weren't written conveniently for the instrument. Ysaÿe solved these issues with some ingenious chords to achieve some connection in the upper tessitura. He also realised some of the passagework wouldn't be heard against the rich orchestration, so he rewrote several passages in the higher register, with double-stops and octaves that would cut through better. And at the climax of the piece Chausson had an isolated fast passage that goes quite high on the instrument. Ysaÿe made it a linear octave passage in the high register, where ingeniously he incorporates the main theme within these fingered octaves, over what was already written.

Nowadays most people perform the original version, but I prefer to use Ysaÿe's revisions as they're extremely effective, elegant and beautiful. It always amazes me that Ysaÿe never studied composition, yet he found such violinistic, idiomatic solutions using the same harmonic structure as the original. And I think the fact that he wrote nine musical poems of his own throughout his life shows how inspirational he found this piece.

Mr Gingold once showed me a letter he received from Joseph Szigeti which says, 'Dear Joe, I wonder if you happen to know if Ysaÿe had a hand in writing the opening of the *Poème*?' Obviously the opening is indicative of Ysaÿe's own style; it's played in a linear, horizontal way, full of long lines and with a thick, gorgeous vibrato. Chausson knew Ysaÿe's style, of course, and wrote it with him in mind. We can certainly all recognise the uniqueness of the work and the artist it was written for.

Possibly the first thing Mr Gingold told me about studying the piece was that you have to know where it came from and how it evolved. Chausson's life was full of turmoil; he came from a rich family and studied law in order to please his father, who thought there was no future in music. He came late to composition although he studied with Massenet and Franck. So throughout his life he had a lot of angst, which can come across in the *Poème*. It's only once you've learnt about the composer that you should start learning the notes. I'd also advise students to practise long tones and minute-long bows, three or four times a day until you can really control the bow. Then you can give these lines the elegance and shapeliness they truly deserve. ●

INTERVIEW BY CHRISTIAN LLOYD

'I have to separate the *Poème* from myself when I'm on stage': Andrés Cárdenes

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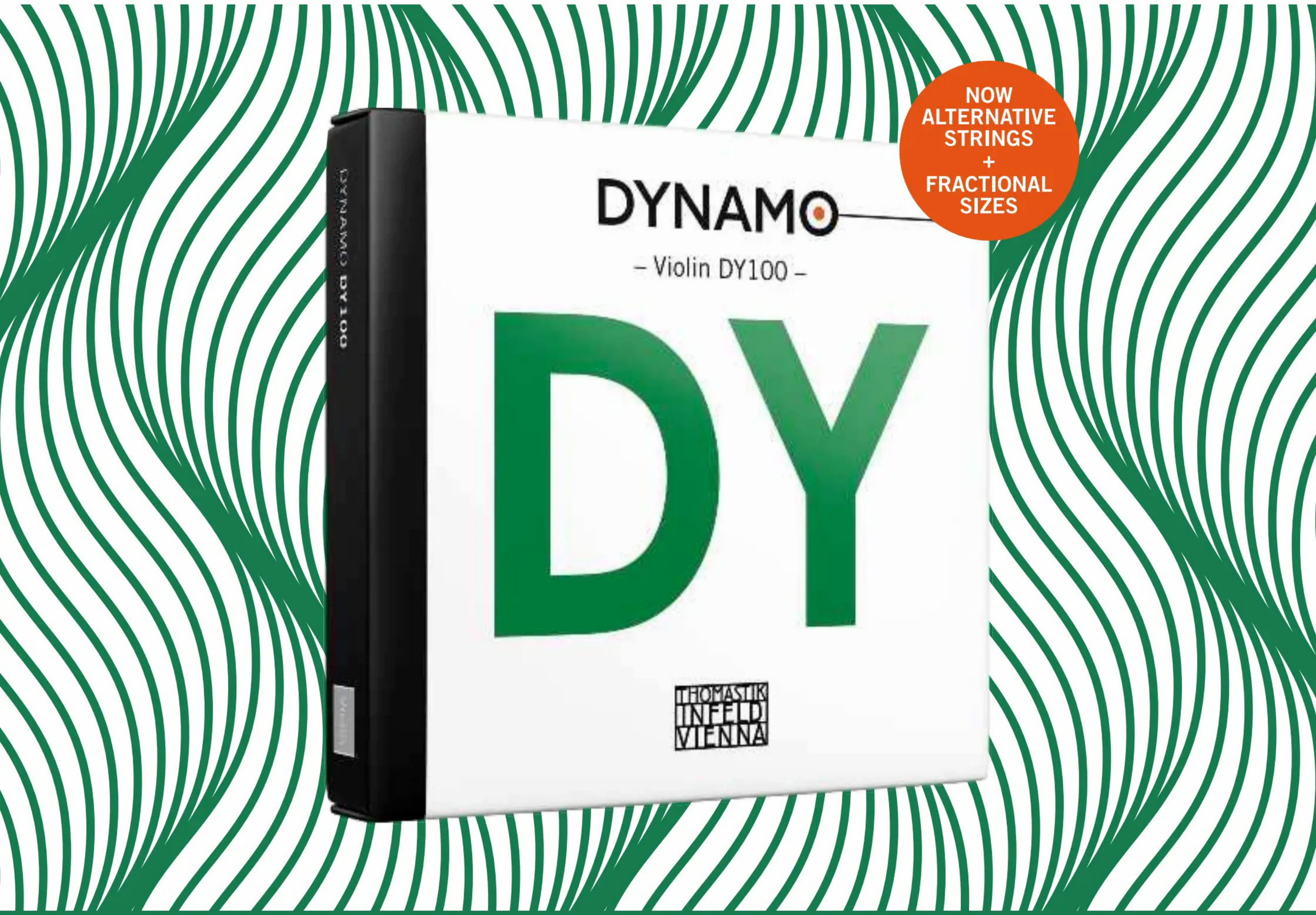

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Welcome to *The Strad*'s 2024 Accessories supplement, filled with new products, ideas and inspiration for string players and makers.

It's exciting to witness the way that technological innovations move from niche to ubiquitous – remember the first smartphones? It's something that applies to the world of string playing, too; in just a few years, fittings made from hardwood alternatives have advanced from being expensive and specialised to affordable and widely available. And with the pressure on the natural world it's good to know we can be more sustainable in our choices without compromising the look, feel and sound of our instruments. On page 4, Peter Somerford looks at some of these alternatives – from carbon fibre bows to sustainable replacements for ebony and pernambuco – which have entered the mainstream market and now apply to almost every type of fitting.

Another example of technology that has progressed in leaps and bounds is the use of effects pedals and loopers to enhance live performance; it's incredible what one musician can achieve with just their instrument (and maybe their voice) and a judicious choice of mics, amps and pedals. On page 12, ten leading non-classical string players talk about their favourite tech tools and how they use them to create their unique music.

Emma Baker editor
Email me at **thestrad@thestrad.com** or tweet **@TheStradMag**

4
Hardwood alternatives

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the Strad

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Natural hardwoods, including ebony and rosewood, are becoming increasingly rare

FUTURE PROOF

Hardwood alternatives are no longer confined to just a few expensive niche products, but are now rapidly entering the mainstream market at every price point and for every type of fitting, as **Peter Somerford** discovers

GETTY/THICHA STUDIO

As the tropical hardwoods used in traditional violin and bow making have been depleted and, in some cases, become subject to international trade regulations, innovators have developed alternatives that seek to serve different market sectors. Carbon fibre is long established as the non-wood alternative to pernambuco for bows, with companies offering models for young students through to advanced and professional-level players. The comparatively recent development of man-made alternatives to ebony for fingerboards and other fittings is accelerating with the emergence of high-tech manufacturing processes and new applications for existing industrial materials. While densified and engineered wood products are being taken up by smaller workshops and individual makers, less expensive ebony alternatives such as compressed recycled paper products may become an option for violin companies with larger production scales, where the cost of materials is a bigger factor.

Awareness of the different ebony alternatives available, but also the ecological reasons for choosing them, is key to wider adoption. Most of the ebony woods in use today come from the Diospyros genus, which covers around 700 species. Of these, 40 are critically endangered according to the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) Red List, 105 are listed as endangered and 92 as vulnerable. In 2013 CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) added 135 species of Madagascan ebony and rosewood to its Appendix II list, which CITES defines as including 'species not necessarily threatened with extinction, but in which trade must be controlled in order to avoid utilisation incompatible with their survival'. More widely, logging practices in which numerous trees were cut down in the search for the few that yield the coveted black heartwood have led to biodiversity losses in some ebony forests. Centuries of over-exploitation have exhausted prime-quality ebony stocks to the point that the overall quality of ebony available today, particularly in the quantities needed for cello and bass fingerboards, is poorer than it used to be.

The International Alliance of Violin and Bow Makers for Endangered Species (alliance-international.org) has begun working with violin making schools in Mirecourt, Parma, Cremona, Chicago and Quebec City to introduce students to ebony alternatives by sending the schools samples of different fingerboard materials along with information about their physical characteristics. Kathy Reilly, president of the Alliance's education committee, is co-owner of Vermont Violins, whose V. Richelieu line of instruments uses two quite different sustainable fingerboard alternatives – Sonowood and GaiaTone. Sonowood, from Swiss Wood Solutions, takes sustainably sourced maple, beech or spruce and densifies it to surpass ebony for density, hardness and sound velocity. GaiaTone, by contrast, is made from 95 per cent post-consumer recycled compressed paper and 5 per cent bio resin. This makes it particularly suitable for cellos and basses, says Reilly, for which Sonowood is relatively expensive and its black beech variant Sonowood Black is not yet available. 'The beauty of recycled paper products is that they're much cheaper than the engineered wood alternatives,' she says. 'And the way you ▹

An example of a V. Richelieu viola, which makes use of sustainable alternatives materials for the fingerboard

CENTURIES OF EXPLOITATION HAVE EXHAUSTED STOCKS TO THE POINT THAT THE OVERALL QUALITY OF EBONY AVAILABLE TODAY IS POORER THAN IT USED TO BE

A fingerboard made from GaiaTone

cut or mill them is less expensive, because instead of doing one or two pieces at a time, you can do 40 or 50 in a run. That brings your processing costs down, and your material costs are less to start with. If we want to make a big shift in the ebony alternatives market, getting these recycled, post-consumer compressed paper products into the hands of the large-scale violin companies is going to make a huge difference.'

One challenge with GaiaTone compared with a wood-based product like Sonowood is tooling. 'GaiaTone doesn't work well with regular block planes, and is more suited to sanding or commercial files,' says Reilly. 'One of our big hurdles in the past year has been developing a block-plane blade that can work with this material, but we've now got a blade that can be retrofitted to the block planes that makers are already using.'

For high-end instruments however, GaiaTone falls short of Sonowood in sonic performance according to Boris Haug, a maker at Swiss firm Wilhelm Geigenbau, which produces a complete range of fittings in ebony alternative materials. 'The sound velocity of the paper product is 3,500m/s, which is even slower than Indian ebony, a short-fibre ebony, so as an alternative material it's comparatively quite soft,' says Haug. 'You can always make the fingerboard thicker to compensate, so it becomes stiffer, but then you compromise the aesthetics, and you're also putting more mass on the instrument.'

Alongside Sonowood, Haug is a proponent of Ebonprex, an industrial material made of thin layers of beech held together with a resin glue. 'Because the fibres in Ebonprex are all parallel, when you cut it and work with it, it feels the same as wood,' says Haug. Ebonprex's stiffness and damping characteristics are similar to ebony, but Haug says the price is considerably lower than Sonowood, a material that requires a more high-tech production process. 'When you use materials that are a near match for ebony in physical characteristics, you don't have to reconfigure the balance of the instrument to a new set of material parameters when swapping out the fingerboard,' he adds. 'We can even make the fingerboards more how they were 50 or 100 years ago. Nowadays you see very thick ebony fingerboards because of the poor quality of the ebony. With an excellent alternative material you don't need such a thick fingerboard. A thinner one looks more elegant.' ▹

As most ebony is not pure black, it is unsuitable for use in the music industry

Ebonprex can be used to make fittings such as fingerboards and pegs

EBONY PHOTO THICHA STUDIO/GETTY

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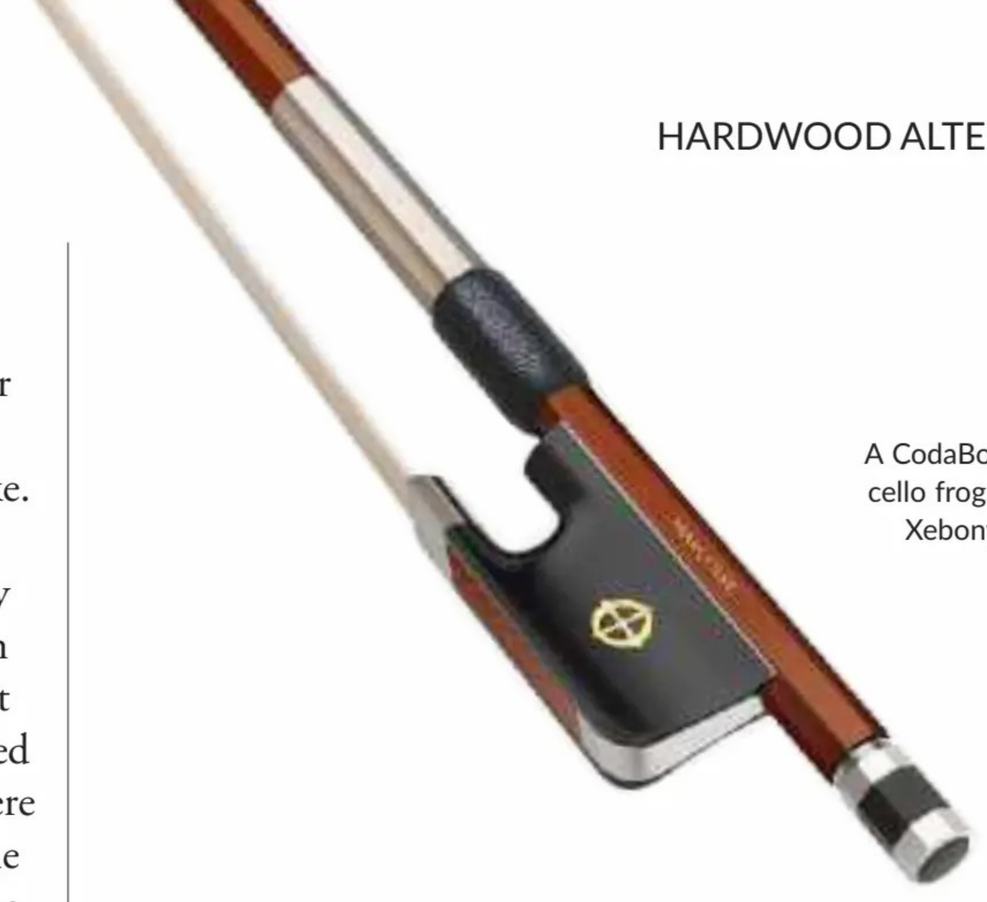


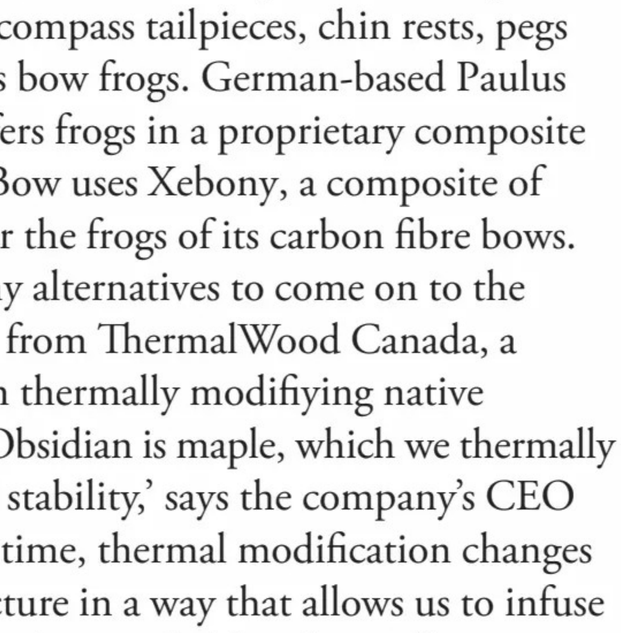
A CodaBow Marquise cello frog, made from Xebony composite

It's also about waste, Reilly says. 'It's now very hard to find good-quality ebony. A new statistic I saw about ebony logs coming out of Nigeria is that only 3–7 per cent are suitable for the music industry. Because what you're looking for is clean, black wood, and that's not what the bulk of ebony trees are like. The question is what happens to the rest of that wood.'

For Reilly, paper-based products such as GaiaTone arguably offer a safer, more sustainable alternative in the long term than either Sonowood or Ebonprex, especially if the focus is on cost and mass production. 'Sonowood and Ebonprex are both certified as sustainable products,' she says, 'but with climate change there is a concern that even European common beech might struggle in the next 30 to 60 years. Should we be relying on a single tree species where it's necessary to take thick pieces of wood and compress them to obtain the characteristics of ebony?' Reilly also notes that the bio resin in GaiaTone is biodegradable, as opposed to the synthetic, phenolic resins in some of the engineered wood products, which potentially introduce new environmental problems. 'We shouldn't just be developing alternatives,' she says. 'We should be finding sustainable alternatives.'

Other man-made ebony alternatives for fingerboards include Néo-Ebène's Corene, an 'eco-composite' of paper fibres with a phenol-formaldehyde resin binder; Flaxwood, a wood fibre composite; Sound Composites Arcotech, which comprises a carbon fibre core, a graphite tooling layer and a maple shim for gluing; and Dark Paper from German fittings company Berdani, a composite of recycled paper and resin. The applications for ebony alternatives go beyond fingerboards to encompass tailpieces, chin rests, pegs and end-buttons, as well as bow frogs. German-based Paulus Bowparts, for example, offers frogs in a proprietary composite called Sucseno, and CodaBow uses Xebony, a composite of organic fibres and resin, for the frogs of its carbon fibre bows.

One of the newest ebony alternatives to come on to the market is Obsidian Ebony from ThermalWood Canada, a company that specialises in thermally modifiying native hardwoods. 'Our base for Obsidian is maple, which we thermally modify to give it increased stability,' says the company's CEO Bob Lennon. 'At the same time, thermal modification changes the wood's molecular structure in a way that allows us to infuse resins even more easily into the wood. After thermally modifying the wood, we place it in a pressure vessel, suck all the air out, and under pressure we infuse resins and dyes into it. Then we cure it under heat, so that afterwards everything is inert.' As with some other products that use synthetic resins, Lennon acknowledges that there can be a slight smell when working with Obsidian – he describes it as a 'fibreglass-type smell' – but says that most customers have no issue with this. With the guitar industry already taking an interest in the product for fingerboards, Lennon started investigating the bowed stringed instrument market in late 2023. 'We're not producing large volumes yet,' says Lennon, 'but once the interest and volume increases, we'll able to bring our pricing down, although most people I've approached already seem happy with the price.'



Pegs made from Dark Paper

BOW MAKERS HAVE TRIED SNAKEWOOD, GIRAFFE THORN ACACIA AND KATALOX, BUT THE MOST SUSTAINABLE NATURAL MATERIAL INVESTIGATED SO FAR IS BAMBOO

With pernambuco, although established bow makers in the US and Europe may have still have personal stocks to last them another 20 or 30 years, bow making students and new makers face an uncertain future. The Brazilian government was unsuccessful with a 2022 proposal to CITES to raise pernambuco from Appendix II to the highest-level Appendix I listing, an outcome which would have made international trade virtually impossible and international travel highly restricted. However, if illegal logging in Brazil's Mata Atlântica rainforest continues, and illicit trade is not stamped out through effective enforcement, calls may grow for stronger international regulation. Despite the efforts of the bow maker-led IPCI (International Pernambuco Conservation Initiative) and partner organisations in Brazil over the past two decades to support sustainable pernambuco forestry with replanting schemes and other conservation projects, the bow making industry is now coming under pressure to work with national authorities to register pernambuco stockpiles and develop a traceability system for bows, possibly using some kind of unique identification code for every pernambuco bow.

As regards alternative woods for bows, ipê has been used as a pernambuco substitute, but is at risk of over-exploitation because of its popularity as a decking material and was added to the CITES Appendix II list in 2022. Bow makers have also experimented with snakewood, giraffe thorn acacia and katalox, but potentially the most sustainable natural material investigated so far is bamboo, which can be found in laminated form in the patented NuBow from bow maker Rodney Mohr. ▹

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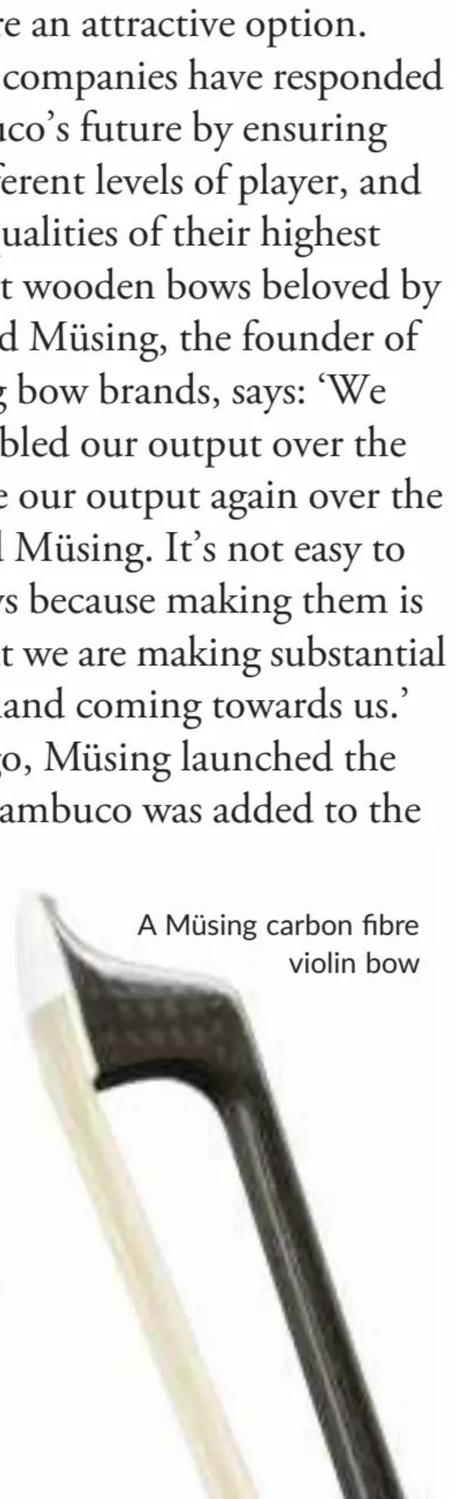
NuBow uses sustainable laminated bamboo

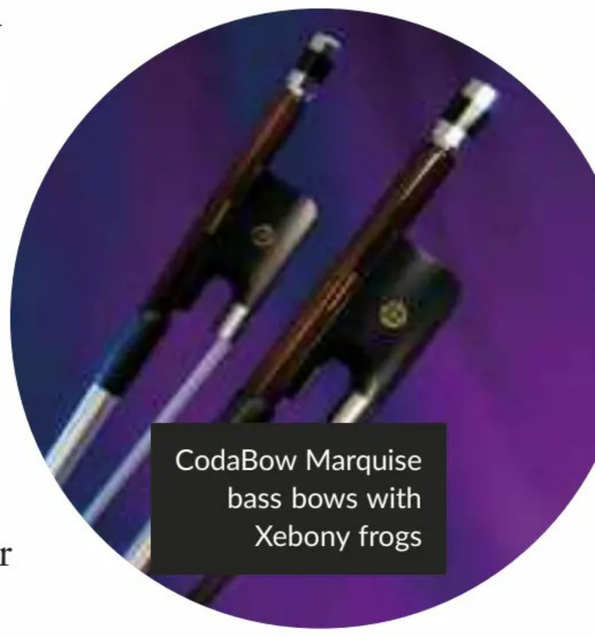
'I AM CONFIDENT THAT WHEN EUROPEAN AND US MAKERS START USING ALTERNATIVES, CHINESE MAKERS WILL FOLLOW' – *BORIS HAUG, FITTINGS MAKER*

For players looking to future-proof their next bow purchase in anticipation of possible harsher restrictions on travel and trade, carbon fibre bows are an attractive option. Established carbon fibre bow making companies have responded to the question marks over pernambuco's future by ensuring they have model lines to cater for different levels of player, and by refining the sound and handling qualities of their highest grade bows to compete with the finest wooden bows beloved by soloists and other professionals. Bernd Müsing, the founder of the German-based Arcus and Müsing bow brands, says: 'We have doubled our workforce and doubled our output over the last five years. And we want to double our output again over the next two years, across both Arcus and Müsing. It's not easy to increase the production of Arcus bows because making them is very labour-intensive and difficult, but we are making substantial investments because I see a huge demand coming towards us.'

Having founded Arcus 25 years ago, Müsing launched the Müsing brand after 2007, when pernambuco was added to the CITES Appendix II list, necessitating permits for the export of wood and bow blanks, although finished bows were exempt. 'I realised that some day a serious problem will hit pernambuco,' says Müsing. 'That meant we had to find a less complex way of making quality bows than the way we manufacture the Arcus bows. The technology we developed to make the Müsing sticks will allow us to make three or four times as many bows in the future. And while Müsing bows don't offer quite the same performance as the Arcus bows, with their walls being not quite as thin, they are still matching pernambuco bows twice their price. We also designed them to be less demanding in playability and sound production, so in the price range of about €1,000 they should provide a good solution for many advancing players.'



A Müsing carbon fibre violin bow



CodaBow Marquise bass bows with Xebony frogs

CodaBow, the Minnesota-based company that traces its origins back to 1956, is also looking to a future of rising demand for carbon fibre bows. 'Our aim has always been to ensure we have a bow in our product line for everyone, no matter their skill level or style,' says the company's sales operations manager, Mary Peterson. 'Even though restrictions aren't universally in place now, and potentially won't be for a long time, I think awareness is growing, and sustainability is becoming more important. Leaning into that will be important for us.' CodaBow's general manager Kai Maurud adds: 'We are in a good position because we are able to scale up production; it's just a matter of adding labour. So as the demand rises, we will rise to meet it. We are also looking at what we can do with automation and building more efficiency into our manufacturing processes to reduce production costs.' CodaBow's top-line model is currently the Marquise, but the company has ambitions to develop a bow that surpasses it. 'Our products do a good job of catering to 85 per cent of musicians now,' says Peterson. 'The next level for us will be going beyond the Marquise and competing with those high-end wooden bows that sell for around the $50,000 level.'

For players who prefer a new pernambuco bow over a carbon fibre one, they could still opt for a sustainable ebony alternative such as Sonowood for the frog. Musicians becoming more aware of ebony alternatives could start to shift the market, but among makers there are still those who already have ample supplies of ebony in their workshop, or others who are attracted to cheap, available sources of ebony. Boris Haug is optimistic, however. 'Once the better shops and the better makers offer players an alternative,' he says, 'other makers will look to what the best in the field are doing and start emulating them. I'm also confident that when European and US makers start using alternatives, Chinese makers will follow. They will come up with their own alternatives.'

Reilly suggests that we look too to the sensitivities and determining power of audiences. 'When we talk about ebony alternatives, or pernambuco alternatives, we focus on the musicians, the makers, the suppliers,' she says. 'We rarely ask what audiences think, even though they pay all of our bills ultimately. What if the audience does not think an instrument made out of endangered species sounds different enough for them to support that player or orchestra? Or the audience just doesn't believe we should use threatened or endangered species? Maybe the communities we perform for will make the decision for us.' ●

OUR FRIENDS ELECTRIC

Casey Driessen in his music studio

Ten leading non-classical string players – from jazz and bluegrass to rock and Gypsy jazz musicians – tell *The Strad* about their favourite on-stage tech, including pedals, loopers, amps, pickups and much more. US multi-genre-blending fiddler **Casey Driessen** leads the charge with an in-depth explanation of his personal set-up

Everything starts with my violin. It's a five-string made by John Silakowski in 2000 that I've been playing for nearly 25 years. I use a **DPA 4099 clip microphone** (dpamicrophones.com) and a **Schertler DYN-V-P48 pickup** (schertler.com). The pickup first goes through the **Schertler Yellow Single** preamp, before uniting with the mic signal in the **Grace Design FELiX2 blender** (gracedesign.com). This is a two-channel mixer that allows me to blend the pickup and microphone together, adjust EQ, and choose the levels for each, which I vary depending on different situations. For example, when I'm looping, the mic can pick up background sounds that muddy the effect, so if I'm outside when it's windy or in a noisy club, I'll go lighter on the microphone and heavier on the pickup. The mic gives me the flexibility to use my voice to add to the loop, whether that's breath or vocal sounds or singing a harmony part.

The Grace FELiX2 also allows me to adjust the phase of the mic and pickup. Even though they are right next to each other on the violin, the signals don't reach the blender at exactly the same time, so you can get what I describe as a somewhat hollow sound. The phase adjustment lets you dial in the waveforms to bring them into phase and the sound then comes into focus.

Next, the signal goes into the **Origin Effects Cali76 Compact Deluxe compressor** (origineffects.com), which evens things out a little bit – it brings dynamics under control, especially when I'm creating bass effects or percussive sounds from the body of my violin using the pickup, which is more stable for these textures; from there it enters a **Fulltone GT-500** (fulltoneusa.com) for a range of mild drive to heavy distortion; and then the signal goes to the **Eventide H9 multi-effects pedal** (eventideaudio.com) with an **MXR Tap tempo** switch (jimdunlop.com). Finally, I have a **Lehle Mono Volume pedal** (lehle.com) that allows me to adjust the level of the parts I'm creating, and also to tune between songs.

The Schertler DYN-V-P48 pickup

And that's what I call my tone board. I use two different pedal boards – this smaller one

MAIN PHOTO COURTESY OF CASEY DRIESSEN

and a larger one that is essentially my effects board. The smaller board is where the sound of my instrument, as it exists, really happens. If I'm playing an Americana gig or something that doesn't require a big array of effects, then I just take the small board with me and I can still plug in and have an effect or two. I use a stereo set up because when I'm looping it allows me to have a wider spread of sound and distinction between parts. With mono, everything can become crowded in the centre.

The Origin Effects Cali76 compressor (*left*) and Eventide H9 multi-effects pedal (*right*)

On my bigger main effects board, I have a lot of different pedals. There's the analogue **Moog MF-108M Cluster Flux** (moogmusic.com); there are a lot of interesting modulation-type sounds I can make with it, even adjusting parameters with my foot via an expression pedal. All my pitch-related effects come from the **Eventide PitchFactor**; it also has an expression pedal for real-time changes. With it I can create effects such as bass sounds, parallel octaves or harmonies: for example I can set it to play in perfect 4ths, or in diatonic four-part harmonies in a particular key, or even something more dissonant like a half step up and 4th down. I really like this pedal; it's a predecessor to the Eventide H9 pedal on my smaller board. The H9 is an updated version that combines all Eventide's Factor pedal effects in one unit, but it requires an iPad or some other Bluetooth interface to operate so it's not as quick to control and harder to manipulate in a live setting.

My reverb pedal is the **TC Electronic Hall of Fame 2** (tcelectronic.com) (*below*). I'm careful with the amount of reverb I use but it's a very useful effect. For me, it's about being able to create tones that contrast with each other when I'm layering, and also to create different atmospheres based on the type of piece that I might be playing. Then I create all the echoes and delays with an **Eventide TimeFactor** plus a tap tempo. The brain of it all is my looper, the **Boomerang III Phrase Sampler** (boomeranglooper.com), with three independent tracks, lots of arrangement options, and even the ability to fade out. The sound then routes back through the GraceFELiX2 on my smaller board, where I can send it out to a mixing board, amps and headphones.

I don't change my pedals very often – when I get used to something, I like to stick with it for a while. I've spent a lot of time practising with the pedals so that they really feel like an extension of my instrument; I know what creative tools they can give me, and when I'm in a live situation I can use them quickly and get the types of sounds that I'm looking for.

However, I have recently acquired a **Hologram Electronics Microcosm pedal** (hologramelectronics.com) which I'm experimenting with. It makes some very cool granular sounds and textures, and it has a looper too. My issue is finding space for it – I could get a bigger board, of course, but I have to the draw the line somewhere especially when I'm travelling and taking flights.

'I'VE SPENT A LOT OF TIME PRACTISING WITH THE PEDALS SO THAT THEY REALLY FEEL LIKE AN EXTENSION OF MY INSTRUMENT'

The first piece of kit I'd advise for someone just starting out would be a delay pedal. Most delay pedals can create a loop as well, because a loop is essentially like a delay or an echo of the sound that you've just made. It's fun to use because it's immediate – you get back what you have just played – and it can be a musical tool as well; for example you can create a rhythmic bed just using a delay.

I've just launched my Blue Ridge Fiddle Camp in North Carolina (blueridgefiddlecamp.com) which takes place for the first time this August, where players can try out looping and effects in our technology lab and experiment with pedal boards. Participants can also explore different eclectic styles and study rhythm.

Last but not least is my **NS Design CR5 five-string electric violin** (thinkns.com) (*right*). I like the weight and balance of it very much, and the fact that it has an upper bout stop as a point of reference. It's better than my acoustic for certain situations such as using the octave pedal to make bass sounds, or when playing in a band where the stage volume is heavier, or creating distortion and overdrive, and I love the pizzicato switch. I like to think of my acoustic fiddle as dressed up for the opera and my electric as dressed up for the club! ▹

INTERVIEW BY EMMA BAKER

‘THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY HAS INSPIRED ME TO PUSH THE BOUNDARIES OF MY MUSICAL EXPRESSION'

SCOTT TIXIER
FRENCH JAZZ VIOLINIST

The relatively young tradition of jazz violin allows for great freedom and space to explore new possibilities. The use of technology, from electric violins to an array of effects pedals, has inspired me to push the boundaries of my musical expression.

In addition to my acoustic violin, I have been using the **Yamaha YEV** and the **Yamaha Silent Violin** (yamaha.com). Some pedals might not perform as effectively with my acoustic violin. But there is a tool for each situation, whether I am working with a jazz band, rock, pop or an orchestra; each scenario has its own set of challenges with the right pedal, and setup. The Yamaha Electric violins have opened territory where the acoustic violin cannot reach, offering a wider range of effects and allowing me to utilise pedals initially designed for guitars, basses, or keyboards. Because multiple microphones are inside the bridge, the response is sharper, and the pedals can be utilised to their full potential. I can also incorporate percussion into my loops by tapping on the violin without the restraint I might feel with my acoustic.

The **Schertler Stat V Pickup** (schertler.com) has been a revelation for my performances, capturing the natural acoustics of the violin without sacrificing quality. It is completely isolated from the environment and captures only the violin sound. This ensures there's no bleed from other instruments around, unlike what one might experience with a clip condenser mic. Another aspect of the Stat V is its lightweight, which gives minimal interference with the feel of your instrument. Its installation on my violin 15 years ago really changed everything for me and got me the ideal balance between the violin's warm, organic tones and the necessary amplification for live band settings.

The Schertler Stat V pickup

The **Boss RC-3 Loop Station** (boss.info) has been helpful in creating music on stage. It allows me to layer violin parts in real time and make intricate, textured compositions. This looper is indispensable for my solo performances, offering a vast landscape of arranging and improvisation possibilities.

The **Electro-Harmonix Canyon Delay Pedal** (ehx.com) (*above*) adds an atmospheric layer to my sound. Its analogue delay capabilities produce a variety of echoes that magnify the violin's timbre. The pedal's flexibility in adjusting delay time and feedback control has made it essential for creating a kind of mystical density in the sound and has brought new ideas for improvising.

TIXIER PHOTO WILL VON BOLTON

TIM KLIPHUIS
DUTCH GYPSY JAZZ VIOLINIST

I was given a **Zeta Strados electric violin** (zetaviolins.com), the fingerboard of which was inlaid with a cool drawing of a running violinist that my daughter Lucy made. To give it the sound I wanted live, I have added the following pedals, which I put on a rack: **MXR six band EQ** (jimdunlop.com) for tweaking the basic sound. It takes out some frequencies I don't like, but this also depends on the venue. Next is the **Whammy foot pedal** (digitech.com). It adds harmonies in pre-composed melody parts and sometimes on improvised bits too. It sounds like two or three fiddles at the same time. Then the **Lil' RAT distortion unit** (ratdistortion.com), which makes it sound really cool. Otherwise you may as well play a miked-up regular violin! Finally, the **Hall of Fame 2** mini (tcelectronic.com) for reverb, which is needed for a non-acoustic instrument wherever you play – a no-brainer.

All of these pedals are powered by the **Voodoo Lab Pedal Power 2 Plus** (voodoolab.com). My choices were inspired by tips from experienced electric players (mostly non-violinists) and also my own ears, by trying stuff out in a shop the old-fashioned way. ▹

The Zeta Strados Electric Violin

The Lil' RAT distortion unit provides striking effects

Voodoo Lab's Pedal Power 2 Plus is the engine behind Kliphuis's set-up

KLIPHUIS PHOTO SIMON VAN BOXTEL

VIOLETA VICCI
SWISS VIOLINIST, VOCALIST AND COMPOSER

My number one accessory is my **DPA condenser mic** (dpamicrophones.com). I place it over the bridge on the violin or my octave viola and use it for both my voice and instrument. I find it reproduces the most natural sound of any microphone I've tried. I often play in slightly louder environments, so I also use a **Fishman V-200** (fishman.com) pickup inside the bridge, which converts the vibrations to sound.

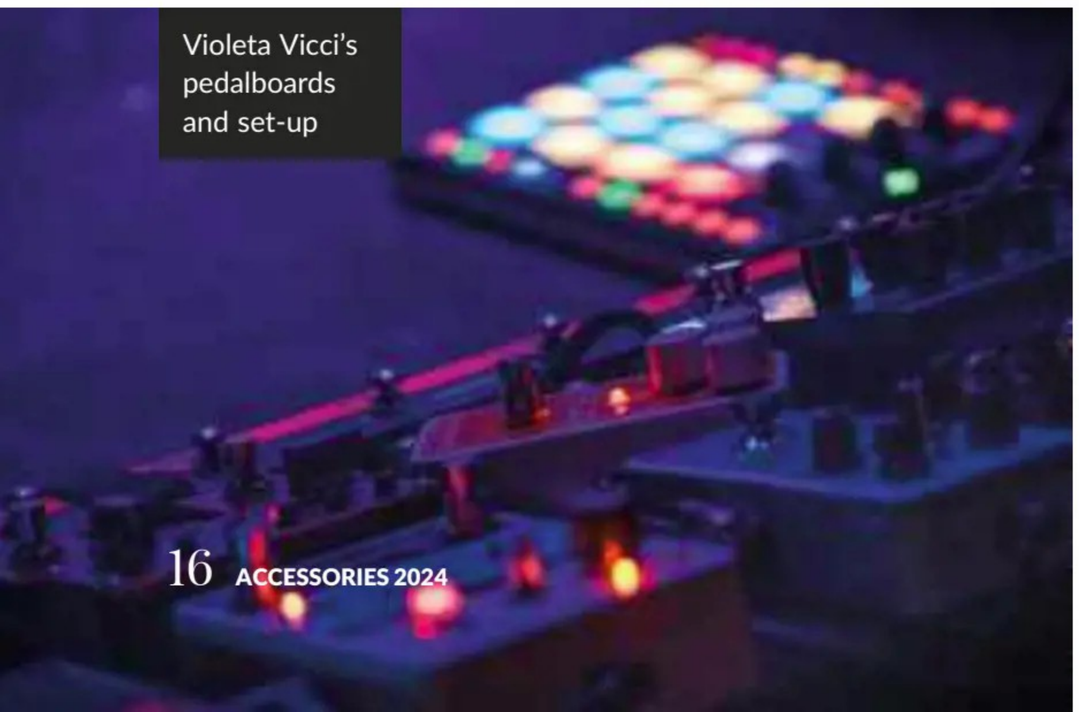
The second most important thing is my laptop. I use **Ableton** (ableton.com) to mix different parts, electronics and my live instrument, before sending it to the venue's sound engineer. That way they receive balanced outputs and I have total control of monitoring the whole concert with headphones. Inside Ableton I use their loop function to loop my live violin and vocals throughout the gig. I activate Ableton's different parameters and functions with a small midi foot pedal. This is a **PreSonus ATOM controller** (presonus.com), which is originally only intended for use with hands. I somehow have become accustomed to using it with my bare feet and several reviewers have remarked on my 'dexterous toes'.
If you're thinking of buying one, I'd say stick to a foot pedal! I also use a second laptop for visuals, which is connected by ethernet cable to my first laptop, giving me full control and syncing audio and videos in real time.

The soundcard I use is the **MOTU UltraLite-mk5** (motu.com), a very compact and great piece of kit for the road with as many as eight outputs. This allows for greater flexibility when sending audio to the sound desk during the performance and lets the sound engineer do a great job of mixing the sound in the space.

Last but not least: my pedals. They do all sorts of things, from delay, to harmonising, to distortion or just adding simple reverb. The first pedal I ever bought was an octave pedal, the **Electro-Harmonix Nano POG** (ehx.com). It's a brilliant piece of kit and adds a very natural-sounding octave to the violin, when I want to sound like a cello or a bass. My most recent purchase is the **Strymon Timeline** (strymon.net), an absolute gem of a delay pedal with many customisable settings, from syncing the BPM of the piece to the length, amount of repetitions and the way the sound is processed.

Fishman V-200 pickup (*left*) Electro-Harmonix Nano POG octave pedal (*above*) and MOTU UltraLite-mk5 soundcard (*below*)

VICCI AND SET-UP PHOTOS DOUG WHINCUP



Violeta Vicci's pedalboards and set-up

ROB FLAX
US ECLECTIC VIOLINIST

My favourite tech accessories? Oh goodness, I have so many favourites… I have so much fun exploring new sounds and new gear! But for brevity's sake I'll keep it to three. Firstly, it would be remiss of me if I did not mention my electric violin – it's my signature model with Volta. The 'Violinatron' hybrid instruments have built-in speakers, so they can work as regular electric violins or be played completely unplugged. I worked with Marat, the company owner and head luthier, to design a built-in delay effect, as well as pick out a custom sparkle blue finish, so my '**Flaxotron**' (bitly.ws/3id4k) looks and sounds amazing!

Delay is the effect that changed the game for me. The legendary **MN3005 bucket-brigade chip** (aionfx.com), coupled with a resonant low pass filter, make for the most magical-sounding repeats. It's also an instrument in its own right, with a pitch-shifting sequencer built in. Double-stops become arpeggios with notes lower than the violin can play on its own. And it saves presets, so another sound I use all the time is a 'spooky, wobbly chorus' that adds dimension and mystery to more static sounds. It elicits a visceral, emotional response every time I use it.

My most recent 'gear essential' for violin is, surprisingly, a bass amp: this past November I fell in love with the new **BG-120 Bass Cub Pro from Phil Jones Bass** (philjonesbass.net). PJB is well known in the bass world for amps and cabinets that feature small but very powerful speakers, and in my experience these smaller speakers lend themselves well to amplifying violin. When combined with PJB's **C2 extension cab**, the BG120 is as loud as any amp I've ever used on a rock band stage. As a standalone combo it's the perfect volume and lightweight package for acoustic gigs that need sound reinforcement. The five-band EQ is intended for bass – there are 'low bass' and 'high bass' knobs, both of which I roll way down – but the frequencies they've chosen and the speakers and cabinet all combine to make an incredibly easy-to-use amp that always sounds good. ▹

Rob Flax's bespoke 'Flaxotron' electric violin (*above*) and the BG-120 bass amplifier (*left*)

FLAX PHOTO OLIVIA MOON PHOTOGRAPHY

MARTHA MOOKE
US ELECTRIC VIOLIST AND COMPOSER

I've been using effects and loops with my electric viola for four decades, starting with analogue, rack-mount gear. I'm currently using a compact pedal board that is home to my beloved **Eventide H90 effects pedal** (eventideaudio.com) plus expression pedal, my long-time looper **Boss RDS300** (boss.info) and a **Line 6 G10SII Digital Wireless System** (line6.com) – so I can roam around the stage and also walk through classrooms and hospital wards to allow students and patients to get up close and pluck a note.

Most pedal boards, whether at the feet of violins, violas, guitars, synths, or more, contain a plethora of effects pedals. The effects, along with the sound system, be it a single amp or stereo PA, become part of the overall instrument sound, just as an acoustic instrument changes sound depending on types of strings or bows. That is why I've always gone for the highest-quality gear, and why now, in particular, the Eventide H90 is the only effects pedal I need!

The Eventide H90 effects pedal

MOOKE PHOTO TINA FINEBERG/NY TIMES. MEYER PHOTO BILL STRUHS

JESSICA MEYER
US VIOLIST AND COMPOSER

I wrote my first looper album *Sounds of Being* on the **Boss RC-20XL** (boss.info), which is a simple one-track loop station. Now, I use a **Boss RC-300 Loop Station**, which has the capacity for three stereo tracks. The fidelity is much better with this looper, and it has phantom power built in. I use a **DPA 4099V** mic (dpamicrophones.com). I play with an **AER Compact 60/4 amp** (aer-music.de) that is made for amplifying acoustic instruments, such as a classical guitar. I could certainly use other amps or a PA, but this one allows me to sound like me. I used this amp for my Viola Concerto and request it whenever I can't travel with it.

The DPA 4099 mic set on a violin

AYANNA WITTER-JOHNSON
BRITISH CELLIST, COMPOSER AND VOCALIST

On stage I play an acoustic cello called Reuben and a **Yamaha SVC 110 Silent Cello (Electric)** (yamaha.com) called Ruby. For Reuben, I love to use a combination of a **DPA 4099 microphone** (dpamicrophones.com), for a round, full-bodied sound with beautiful clarity on the top end, plus a **Schertler DYN C-48** (schertler.com) contact microphone to beef up the lower frequency bass end of my playing. I also use the Schertler for monitoring as the DPA is super sensitive in the wedges.

With Ruby, I love to feed her through an **EBS Stanley Clarke Acoustic Preamp** (ebssweden.com), then feed that signal through my **EBS OctaBass Blue Label pedal** and finally, feed the bass pedal signal through an **Ampeg Bass Amp** (ampeg.com) for a true 'dub reggae' bass sound. It is epic!

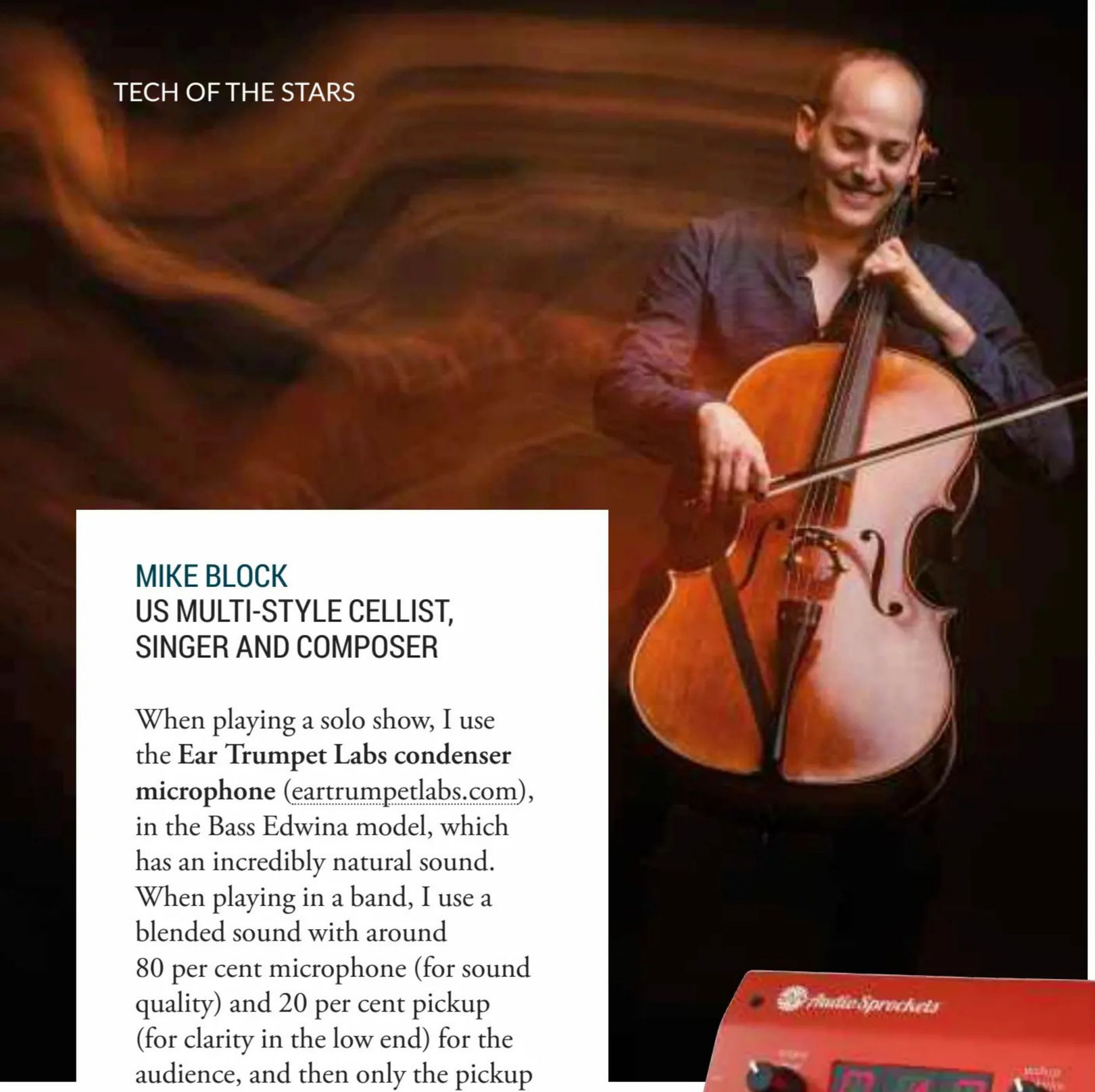
In the studio for recording both cellos and my vocals, I'm in love with the **UAD Apollo Twin X Quad Heritage audio interface** (uaudio.com). The UAD Console program that accompanies the hardware allows me to save recording pre-sets with an infinite number of plugins available so I can tailor my desired sound for each set-up. All I have to do is plug in and start recording. It's a game changer! I'm also thinking about using it live alongside my beautiful **BOSS RC-600 loop station** (boss.info) which is a true gem of a looper. The six stereo tracks available mean I can layer myself to high heaven and manipulate each one individually. It's a dream! For percussion in my right foot while I'm playing, the **Roland SPD::ONE Kick Electronic Percussion Pad** (roland.com) is great fun and has a fantastic range of settings to vary articulation. ▹

The EBS Stanley Clarke Acoustic Preamp

'I CAN LAYER MYSELF TO HIGH HEAVEN AND MANIPULATE EACH TRACK INDIVIDUALLY. IT'S A DREAM!'

The EBS OctaBass Blue Label octave effects pedal

WITTER-JOHNSON PHOTO BENJAMIN EALOVEGA



MIKE BLOCK
US MULTI-STYLE CELLIST, SINGER AND COMPOSER

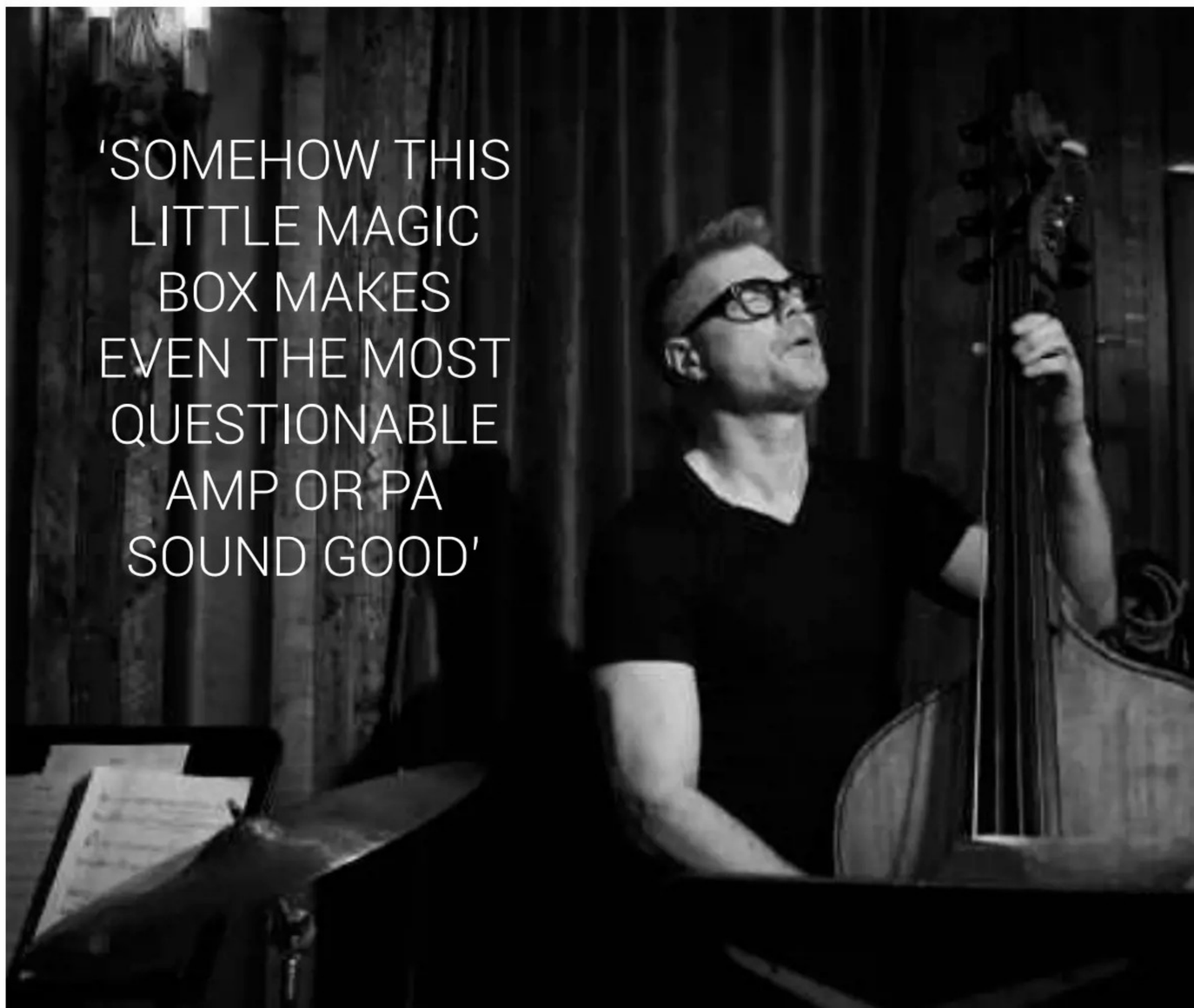
When playing a solo show, I use the **Ear Trumpet Labs condenser microphone** (eartrumpetlabs.com), in the Bass Edwina model, which has an incredibly natural sound. When playing in a band, I use a blended sound with around 80 per cent microphone (for sound quality) and 20 per cent pickup (for clarity in the low end) for the audience, and then only the pickup line in the monitors (to avoid feedback). My equipment is **a DPA 4099 clip-on microphone** (dpamicrophones.com) and the **Realist Pickup** (realistacoustic.com), going through a pre-amp with EQ; both the **ToneDexter** (audiosprockets.com) or **LR Baggs Venue DI** (lrbaggs.com) are great. I add a **Rolls Mic Switch** (rolls.com) on the microphone line that allows me to be in control of muting.

The Realist Pickup adds clarity to bass sounds

The ToneDexter preamp (*left*) and LR Baggs Venue DI box (*above*) balance the signal from the mic and pickup

MICHAEL BATES
US–CANADIAN JAZZ DOUBLE BASSIST

The **SansAmp Tech 21-NYC Programmable Bass Driver** (tech21nyc.com) is an indispensable part of my live and studio rig. It's a high-level analogue DI and replicates the sound of a variety of amplifiers. As a double bassist who strives for a sound that is an extension of my instrument, the SansAmp is wonderfully transparent. The Blend function allows me to dial in as much or as little colour as needed and somehow this little magic box makes even the most questionable amplifiers or PAs sound good. It has three channels that allow me to store settings for whatever the gig calls for; it can go gritty to ultra clean, and dialling in the sound for whatever the room calls for is easy. ●



BLOCK PHOTO TODD ROSENBERG. BATES PHOTO JOSH SEIDEN

STRING ACCESSORIES 2024

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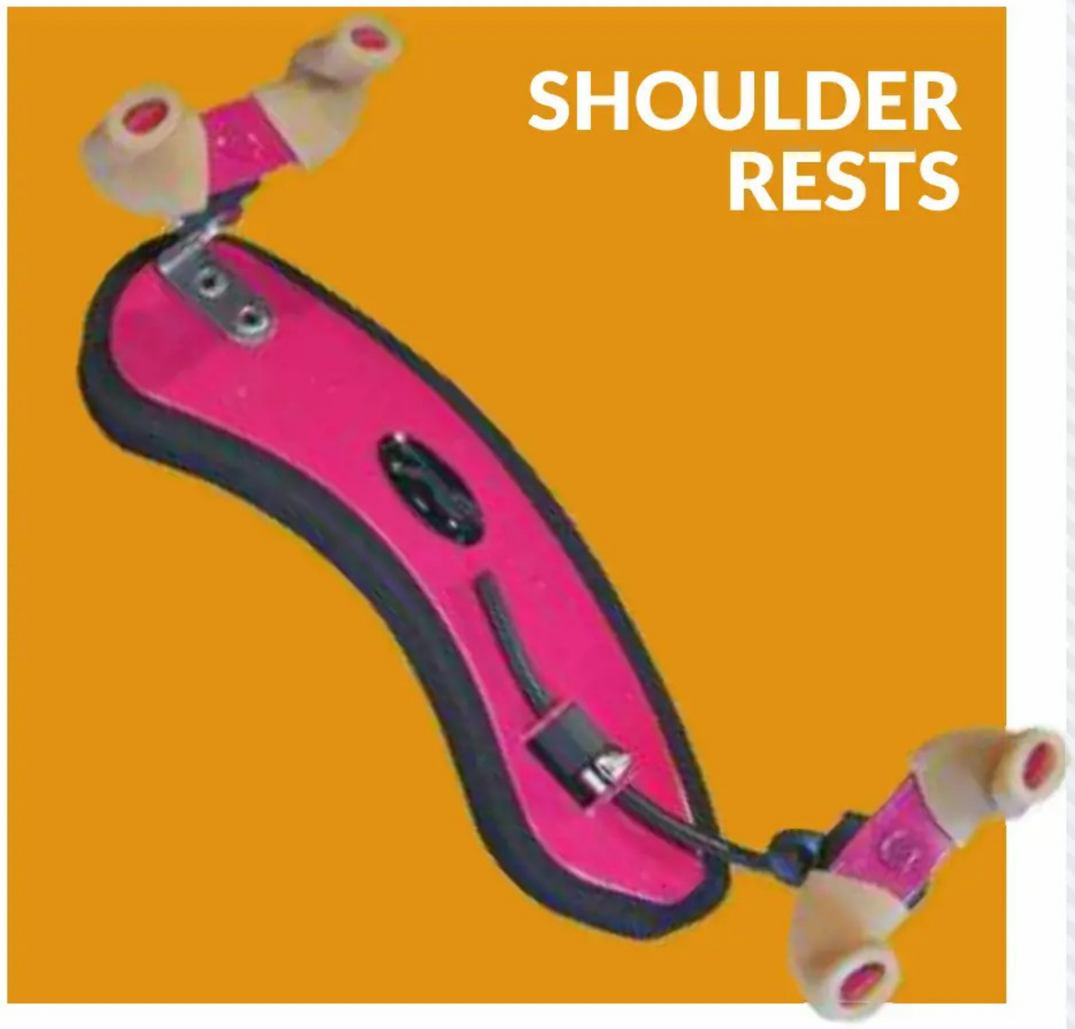


The top products of the year for string players and makers

CASES

A colourful collection to protect your instrument

NEW SHADES

BAM's l'Étoile Hightech Slim cello case now comes in three new colours: light green, navy blue and raspberry. The 4.8kg, leather-fronted case includes two bow holders, a string pocket, and scroll and neck straps. The shell is a triple-ply structure including ABS and Airex foam and features five latches.
BAM L'Étoile Hightech Slim cello case from £1,900
email bam.cases@bamcases.com
web www.bamcases.com

ECO CASE

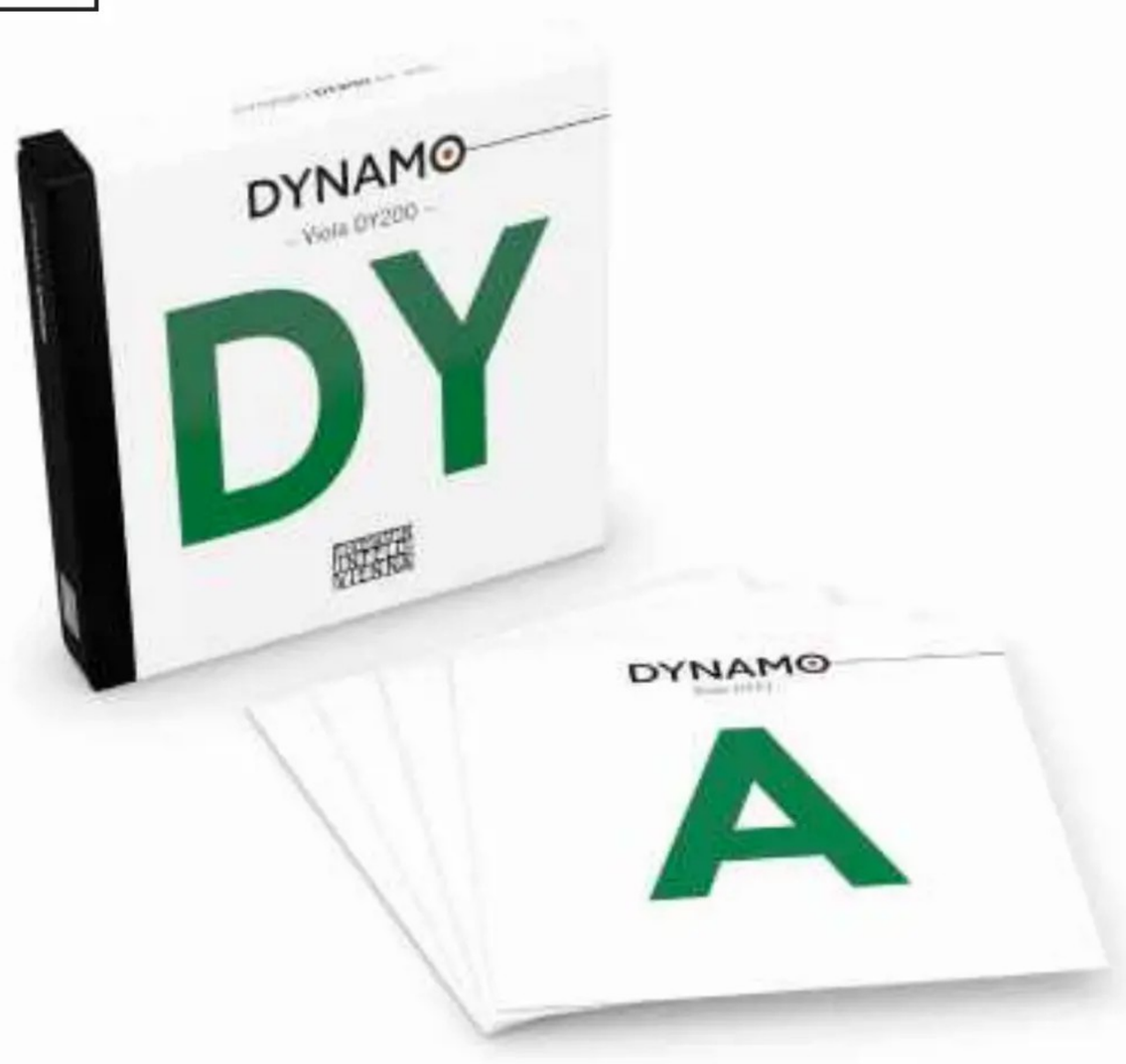
Gewa's new Bio A case can fit half- to full-size violins due to an adjustable neck rest. Its shell is made of an organic flax fibre and the case weighs 2.8kg. It holds two bows and includes an accessory compartment, a removable external music pocket and two detachable back straps. It comes in blue, violet, lime and beige.
Gewa Bio A violin case £177
email info@gewamusic.com
web www.gewamusic.com

SHOCK PROOF

Negri's new Quantum violin case is designed to absorb external shocks. It features an adaptable suspension system inside, has silicon plates to absorb shockwaves, and is reinforced by aluminium plates. It comes in both triangular and oblong shapes, which weigh 1.98kg and 2.3kg respectively, and in five colours. The velour-lined interior includes an accessory pocket and four bow holders.
Negri Cases Quantum violin case from €590
email info@negricases.com
web www.negricases.com

STRINGS

New violin and viola sets



NEXT UP

After launching its Dynamo range with violin strings, Thomastik-Infeld has released a Dynamo viola set. The strings are designed to offer a broad sound, excellent response and a wide dynamic range. The carbon steel-core A string is wound with chrome, while the D, G and C strings have synthetic cores and are wound with silver/chrome, silver and tungsten/silver respectively.
Thomastik-Infeld Dynamo viola strings €161.46
email info@thomastik-infeld.com
web www.thomastik-infeld.com

SHINING EXAMPLE

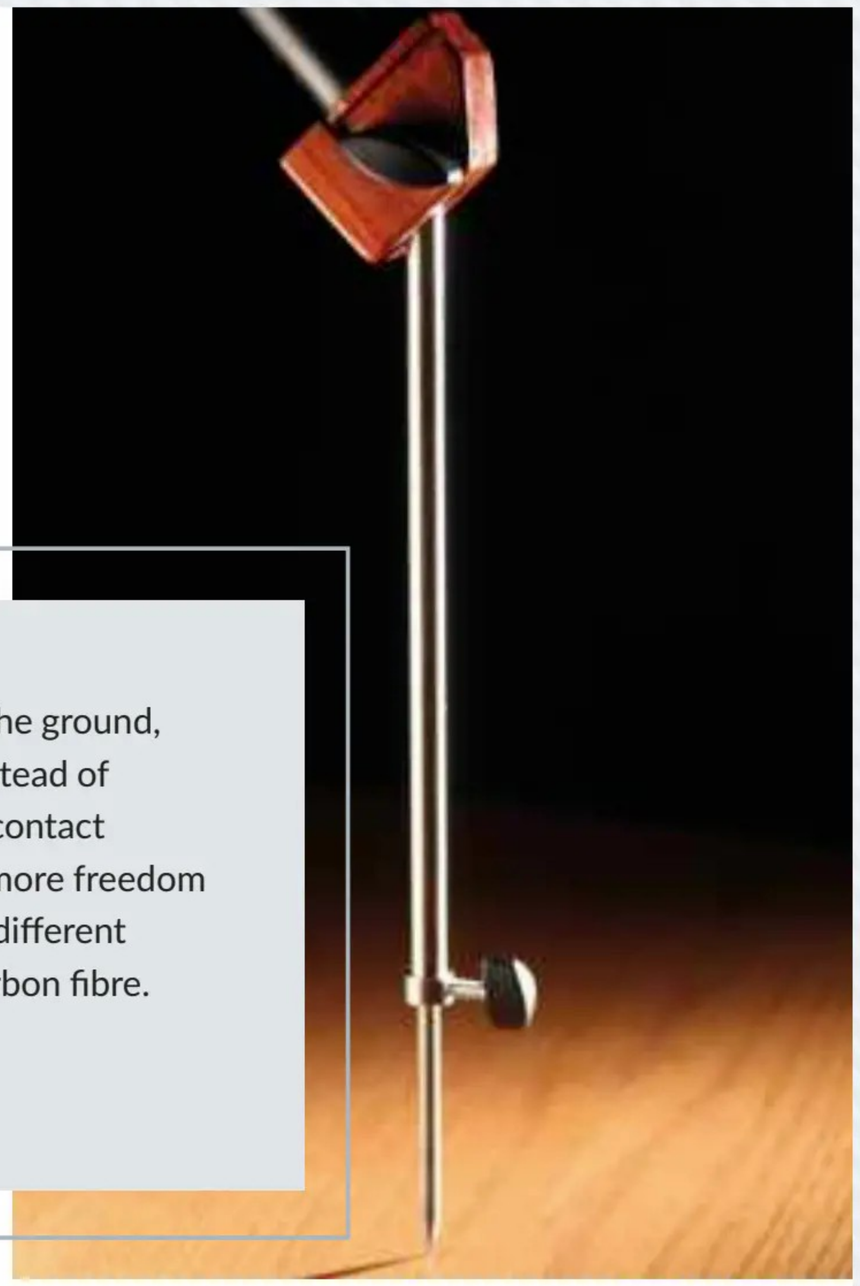
Thomastik-Infeld has released the Rondo Gold violin strings. Although made to be similar in playability to the Rondo, Thomastik describes the new set's sound character as warm, shiny and precise. The set includes two carbon steel-core E strings, one tin-plated and the other gold-plated. The rest have synthetic cores, with the A string wound in aluminium and both D and G strings wound with silver.
Thomastik-Infeld Rondo Gold violin strings €119.26
email info@thomastik-infeld.com
web www.thomastik-infeld.com

PERSONAL TOUCH

Like the rest of the Solea range, the Solea viola strings are made with a bespoke synthetic core. The company focused on response, comfort of playing and balance for the set. The A is wound with aluminium, while the D, G and C are wound with a range of metals. Three tensions are available: light, medium and forte.
Corelli Solea viola strings from €100
email info@savarez.com
web www.savarez.com

CELLO

Stabilising accessories for cellists



SET IT STRAIGHT

Emmanuel Feldman's TekPin, angled at 90 degrees to the ground, concentrates the cello's weight directly downwards instead of against the endpin shaft. This creates a lower point of contact between the cello and the player's chest, allowing for more freedom of motion. The rod is slightly flexible to accommodate different styles of playing. It is available in stainless steel and carbon fibre.

TekPin $750–$800
email tekpinusa@gmail.com
web www.tekpinusa.com

MAKE NO MOVE

The Blocketto was created to secure the bridge while tuning and changing strings, and to prevent it from falling. It was also built to protect the bridge from deformation over time as well as avoid long-term damage to the instrument by distributing some of the strings' tension to the Blocketto. The device is slotted on to the bridge and is then secured by adjusting the slider up until it touches the fingerboard.

Sorgentone and Mecatti Blocketto for cello €60
email info@sorgentonemecatti.com
web www.sorgentonemecatti.com

ROOM FOR MANOEUVRE

Dolfinos' cello grip-foot was made to offer freedom of movement and stability for cellists. The product consists of a detachable elastomer sleeve, a plastic plate, and a steel attachment into which the player fits their endpin. The sleeve has a micro-lamella structure that retains its stickiness for over six months. The foot weighs 50g and fits spikes with diameters of 6.5–9.8mm.

Dolfinos Cello Grip-Foot £54
email mail@dolfinos.com
web www.dolfinos.com

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Kun Seven, our newest shoulder rest, offers violinists unrivalled customisation for an uncompromised fit.

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For full-size violin.

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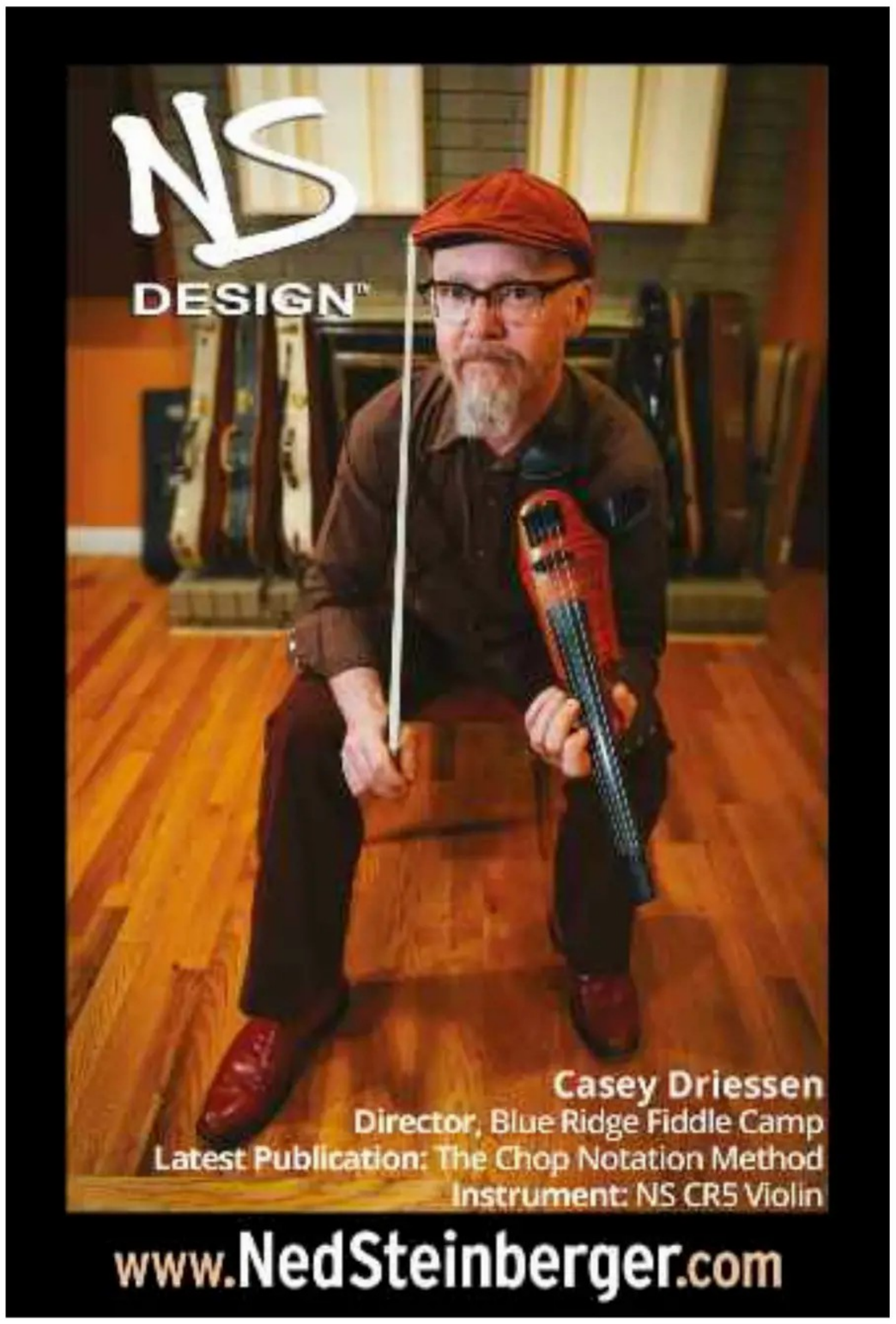
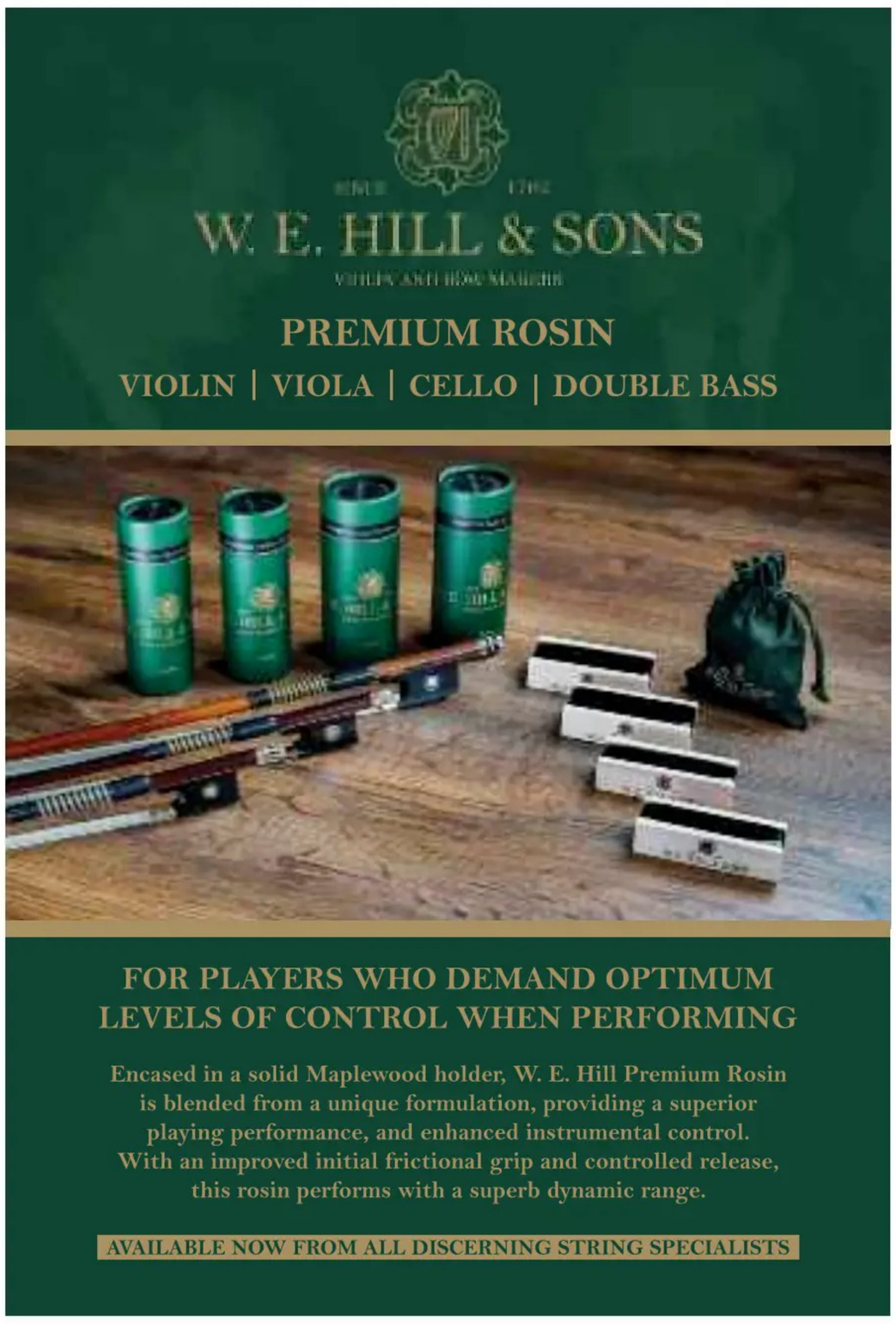

NS
DESIGN
Casey Driessen
Director, Blue Ridge Fiddle Camp
Latest Publication: The Chop Notation Method
Instrument: NS CR5 Violin
www.NedSteinberger.com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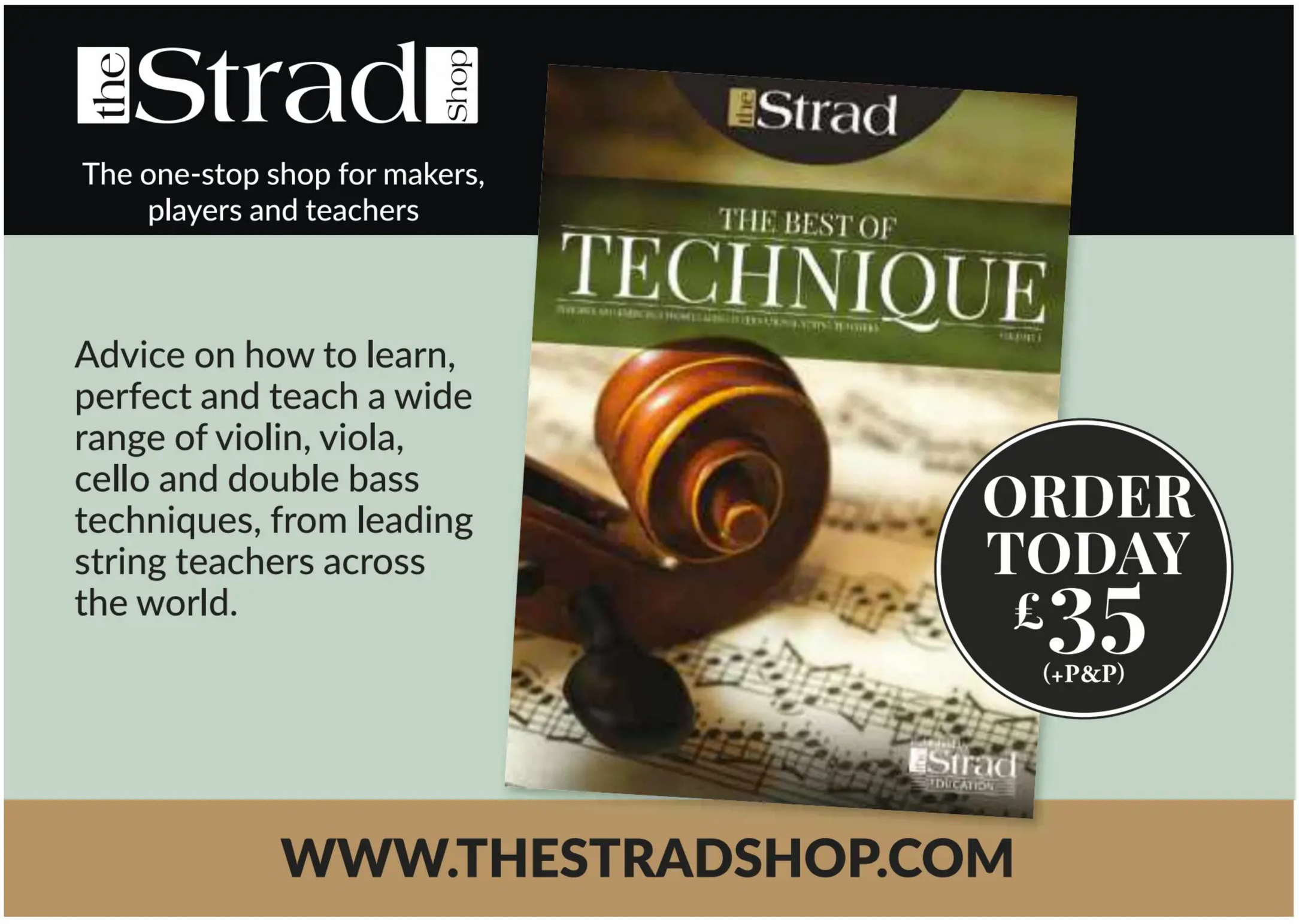
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MUTES

Varying materials to help you keep quiet

RATTLE AWAY

D'Addario's Spector Mute for violin was created to eliminate rattling while playing and minimise interference with the instrument's sound. The mute slides next to the bridge and does not need to be directly put on it. It is available in black and copper colours.
D'Addario Spector Mute for violin $10
email contact via website
web www.daddario.com

SOUND YOUR HORN

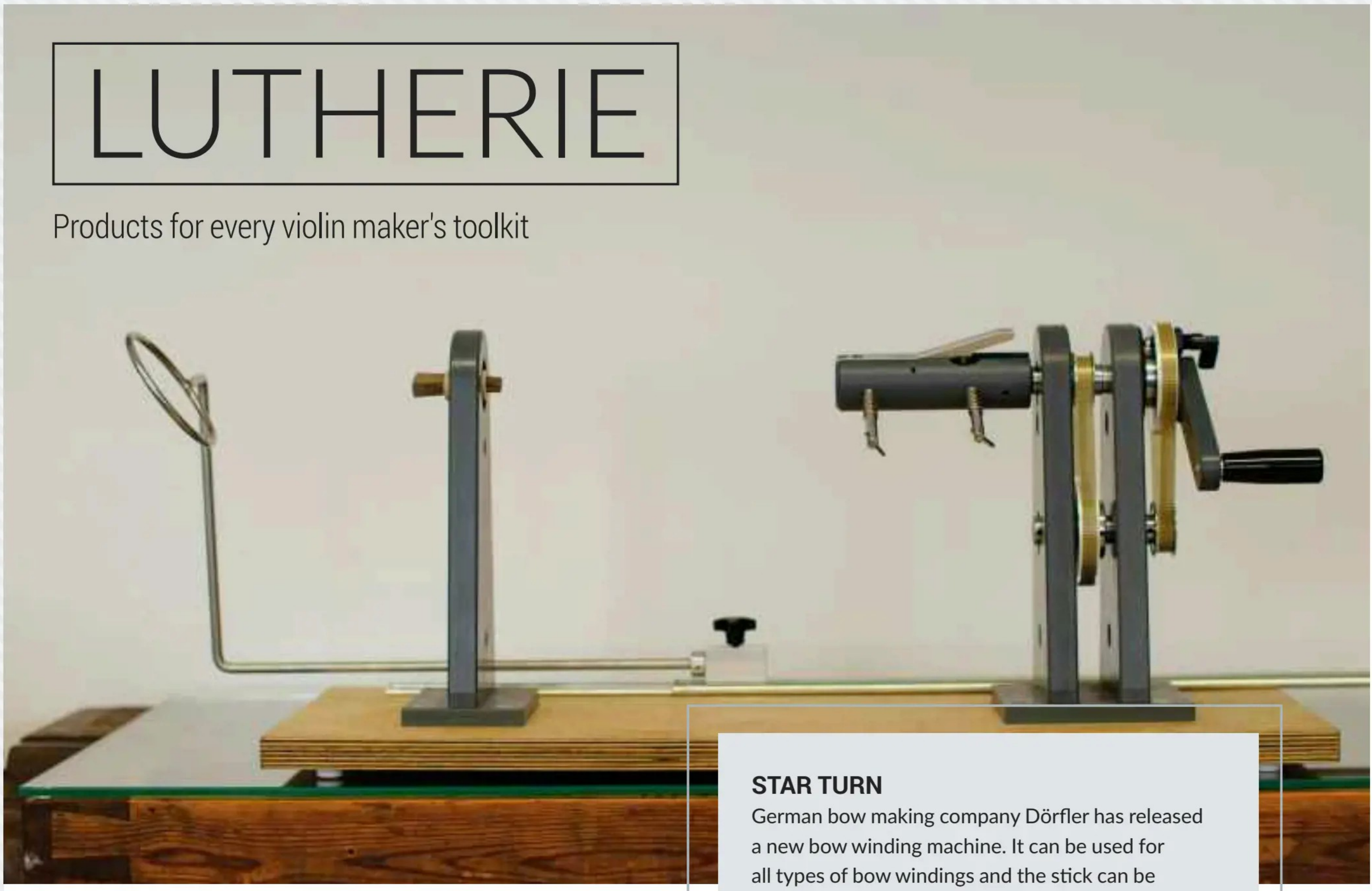
The animal-horn violin and viola mutes from Eenhar were made to avoid choking the instrument's tone while still using natural materials. The mutes are available in the thinner Solo and thicker Orchester versions. They also come in either light or black horn and can be engraved with initials on request.
Eenhar animal horn mutes from €30
email contact@eenhar.lu
web www.eenhar.lu

SILENCE IS GOLDEN

WMutes's violin practice mutes are made of brass and plated with either gold, ruthenium or silver. They are available in both matte and polished versions. While the sound is similar to a standard practice mute, this product was created to have a richer, more stable and focused sound, and the rubber-cork inside was added to fit smoothly on the bridge. They can be personalised with up to 15 characters.
WMutes practice mute for violin from €68
email contact via website
web www.wmutes.com

LUTHERIE

Products for every violin maker's toolkit



STAR TURN

German bow making company Dörfler has released a new bow winding machine. It can be used for all types of bow windings and the stick can be fixed in any position. Once the bow is secured, the winding is placed around the stick and the user turns the crank to apply the winding. The machine can be purchased by emailing the company.

Dörfler bow winding machine €1,600
email mail@doerfler-bows.com
web www.doerfler-bogen.de

STAY FRESH

Originally designed for woodworkers, StopLossBags are now available to luthiers. The product holds and keeps varnishes, stains and paints fresh, thanks to its three-ply construction and a design that stops air from entering the bag. The user can pour out the exact amount of liquid they need, plus the bags are reusable and hold one litre.

StopLossBags 2-pack $7.25
email grant@stoplossbags.com
web www.stoplossbags.com

SAY ALOE

Kremer Pigmente has released a new natural resin, its Aloe Resin Socotra. It was created using the aloe perryi plant, which is indigenous to the island of Socotra in Yemen. The product is made to be added to violin varnishes to give a yellow colour. It comes in either 100g or 1kg quantities.

Kremer Pigmente Aloe Resin Socotra €20.83 for 100g
email info@kremer-pigmente.com
web www.kremer-pigmente.com

SHOULDER RESTS

Rests for every shoulder shape

COLOUR POP

Initially targeted towards children, Wolf's coloured shoulder rests are now available in all of the company's models, including the Forte Primo, Forte Secondo, Standard Primo, Standard Secondo. The coloured rests come in nine colours: blue, bronze, green, black, orange, pink, purple, red and silver.

Wolf coloured shoulder rests price dependent on model
email contact@wolfproducts.com
web www.wolfproducts.com

SEPARATE WAYS

The Kun Seven's key innovation is a decoupling of the bridge and pad, designed to make its position and placing customisable. The bridge's inner part can be extended by using a brass spring clip, and the feet's screws are offset to reach further down the purfling to secure the rest better. The pad is covered in a silicone-coated fabric for extra grip and has a manipulable aluminium core.

Kun Seven violin shoulder rest
approx $220–250
email contact via website
web www.kunrest.com

FRESH APPROACH

Nine years after the release of the maple and aluminium KorfkerRest, Pirastro has come out with a synthetic model: the KorfkerRest Luna. The legs can be folded, adjustment does not involve screws, and extra barrel legs of different lengths are provided. Extensive testing into the acoustical properties of different material compounds were done to find the final material. The rest was also created to be more affordable than the earlier model.

Pirastro KorfkerRest Luna shoulder rest from £195
email info@pirastro.com
web www.pirastro.com

TECH

Lights, tuners and microphones

SEE THE LIGHT

König & Meyer's new Double2 LED FlexiLight stand light features a USB-rechargeable battery. It has two foldable lights, which can be positioned independently and have a service life of up to 100,000 hours. The clip can attach to music stands and tabletops. It is made of plastic and weighs 0.11kg.

König & Meyer Double2 LED stand light approx £26
email contact@k-m.de
web www.k-m.de

PITCH PERFECT

Snark's new rechargeable clip-on tuner is made with titanium and is covered in rubber to remove ambient noise during tuning. It has a USB charging port, tunes from 415–466Hz, rotates 360 degrees and features a high-resolution LCD screen. It also includes vulcanised rubber joints, designed to resist temperature changes.

Snark Titanium clip-on tuner £32.99
email sales@jhs.co.uk
web www.jhs.co.uk

BETTER TOGETHER

Kinsman's microphone kit is for acoustic musicians wishing to record audio at a professional level. The microphone, which measures 46 x 150mm and weighs 316g, was made to filter out background noise and record omni-directionally. The kit also includes an anti-vibration shock mount, adjustable desk-mount stand, windshield, mic clip and cable.

Kinsman Condenser Microphone Kit from £59.99
email sales@jhs.co.uk
web www.jhs.co.uk

ROSINS

Recipes for every type of bow

NEW TRADITIONS

The Signature Formula was introduced in 2020 as the flagship formula of the Cecilia Rosin Collection. It is formulated for clearly defining bow reactions, to be used in small amounts, and to provide full and rich tone quality without excessive traction on the strings. Available for violin, viola and cello, it comes in both mini and full sizes, with the latter including a rosin spreader as standard.

Cecilia Rosin mini rosins from $29

email mgt@cremonainamerica.com

web www.cremonainamerica.com

WARM RECEPTION

W.E. Hill & Sons' Premium rosin was made to improve on initial grip and a controlled release. It was created to be suitable for all climates, and to produce a warm sound. It is available for violin, viola, cello and double bass and comes in a maplewood holder, dark green drawstring bag, and tube.

W.E. Hill & Sons Premium rosin £36.95

email contact via website

web www.wehillandsons.com

ENDLESS OPTIONS

Melos Rosin's Classical series is available for violin, viola, cello and bass, and comes in Light and Dark types. The Light was created for high temperatures and to deliver a warm sound. The Dark was made for more grip, lower temperatures and a fuller tone. Mini versions are available for violin, cello and bass, while a Sticky version was created for cello.

Melos Rosin classical series from €12.90

email contact via website

web www.melosrosin.gr

BASS

Double bass-specific products

READY TO ROLL

The R.C. Williams Bass Buggie allows the double bass to be fitted on the resin-compound stand upright and be pulled along, avoiding the often-strenuous act of carrying the heavy bass. It can be used for basses from 1/10 to full size, and can be used with and without an instrument bag. It weighs 1.6kg, comes in red and black, and can be used both indoors and outdoors. A Cello Buggie is also now available.

R.C. Williams Bass Buggie $145
email nancy@rcwilliamsco.com
web www.rcwilliamscompany.com

STICK WITH IT

Leatherwood Rosin's new double bass rosin was designed to be multipurpose. It comes in two recipes: Bass and Bass Extra. The former is suited to heavy orchestral playing and can be used by students and professionals, while the latter was made to offer more depth of tone and stickiness, particularly in cold and dry climates.

Leatherwood double bass rosin €50
email rosin@leatherwoodrosin.com.au
web www.leatherwoodrosin.eu

BOW OUT

The Roth and Junius Bass Bow TP Quiver is used to store double bass bows while not being played. The bassist ties the quiver to the instrument tailpiece to use. It is approximately 41.5cm long and made of leather, and is available in both brown and wine red.

Roth & Junius Bass Bow TP Quiver from £24.90
email streicher@thomann.de
web www.thomann.de

“Dare to be the finest.”

Preferred by world class artists

CECILIA

Premium Rosin Collection

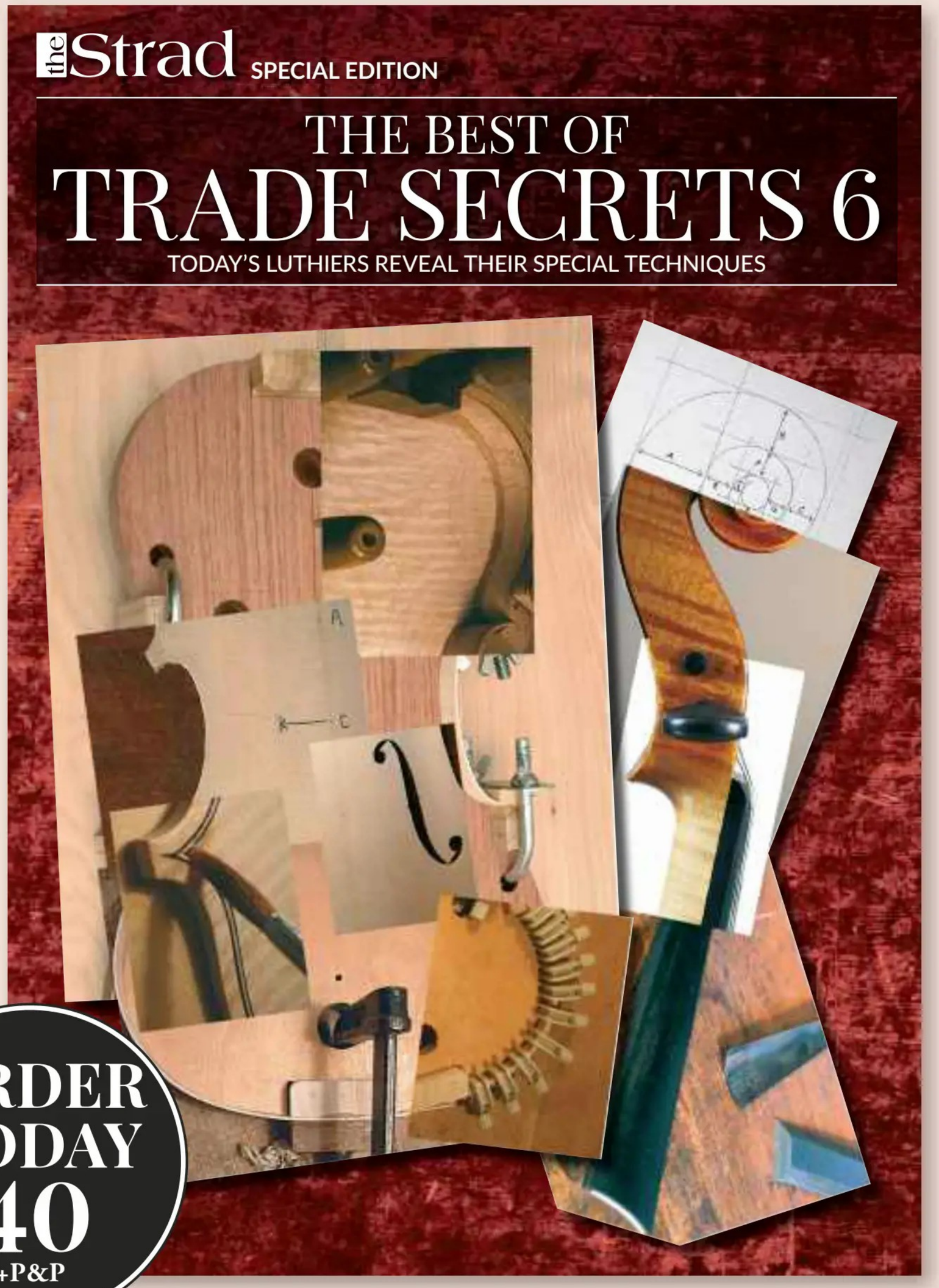
the Strad Shop

The one-stop shop for makers, players and teachers

The Best of Trade Secrets 6

The latest in *The Strad*'s best-selling series, *The Best of Trade Secrets 6* contains even more creative, innovative and individual techniques for instrument making and repair. Within its 120 pages, luthiers from all over the world reveal their personal methods in chapters such as Form and Construction, Set-up, Tools, Edgework and Purfling, and Varnish and Glue. There's also a section on bow making.

Many of the writers have received awards at prestigious instrument making competitions, with names such as Davide Sora, Nicolas Gilles and Philip Ihle among their number. This new collection will be an essential addition to any violin or bow maker's bookshelf and workbench.



ORDER TODAY £40 +P&P

WWW.THESTRADSHOP.COM

PHOTOSHOP: A STARTER GUIDE FOR LUTHIERS

The Strad's art editor gives a guide to creating, isolating and removing images from a background, as well as understanding colour corrections and saving the files

BY ANGELA LYONS
Art editor, *The Strad*, London, UK

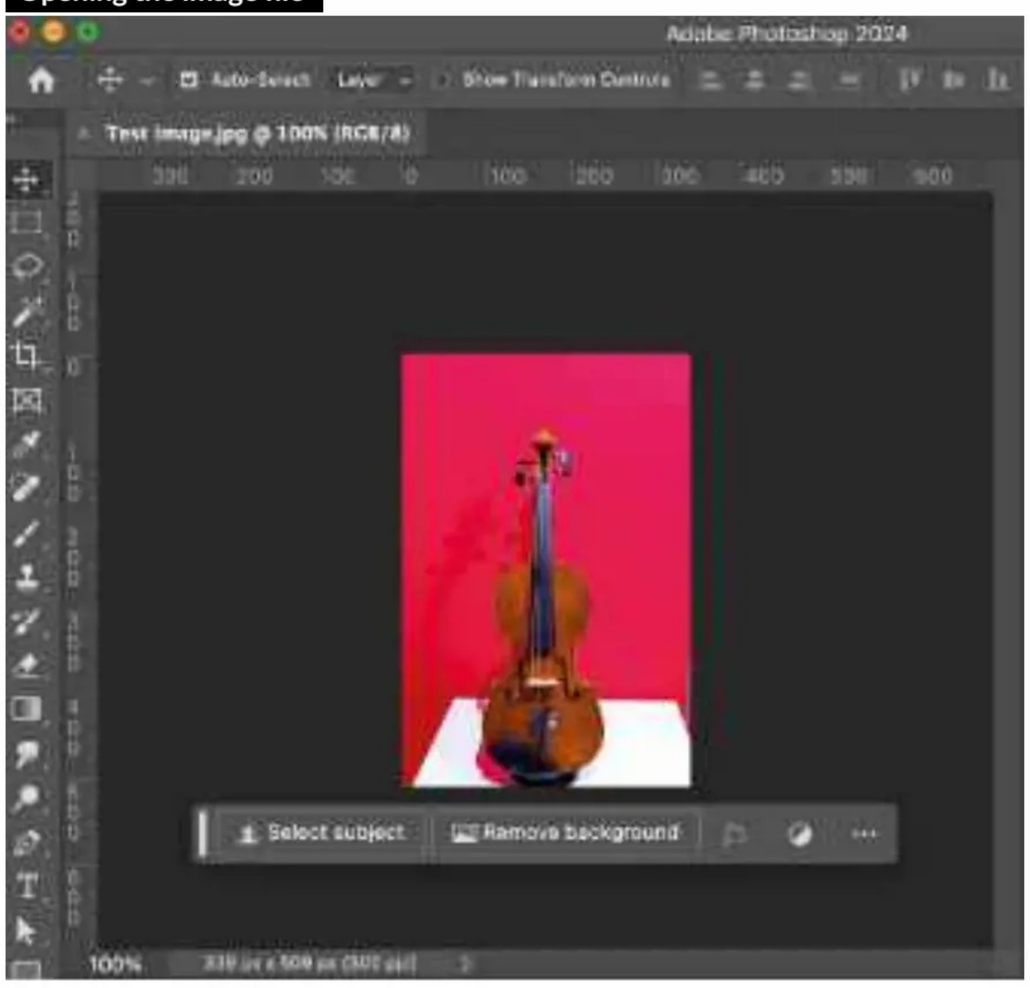
Digital design has changed dramatically over the years, and this includes the popular design software Adobe Photoshop. Used by many graphic designers, photographers and design enthusiasts, it is a powerful tool that can enhance your images and designs. Adobe InDesign and Adobe Photoshop are what we at *The Strad* use to create this publication.

Every month I process dozens of images before the magazine is ready to go to press. Very frequently, I receive an instrument photo on a busy or coloured background, whereas in the magazine it needs to be white (such as in the In Focus section). This means I need to *isolate* the image from its background. Additionally, the colours may need adjusting.

When it comes to working with images, we need to understand the different colour modes for digital and print output. The images supplied are often RGB (Red, Green, Blue), which is the standard format for digital use. We should also note that a computer screen is backlit, meaning that the images will always appear brighter and more vibrant than in print. The standard format for print publication is CMYK (Cyan, Magenta, Yellow, Key – Black). The inks on paper can dull an image a little, but this is where we can correct images in Photoshop and restore some of the vibrancy.

The version of Adobe Photoshop I am using for this article is Version 25.1.0 on a Mac. Other versions may look slightly different on your own computer screen.

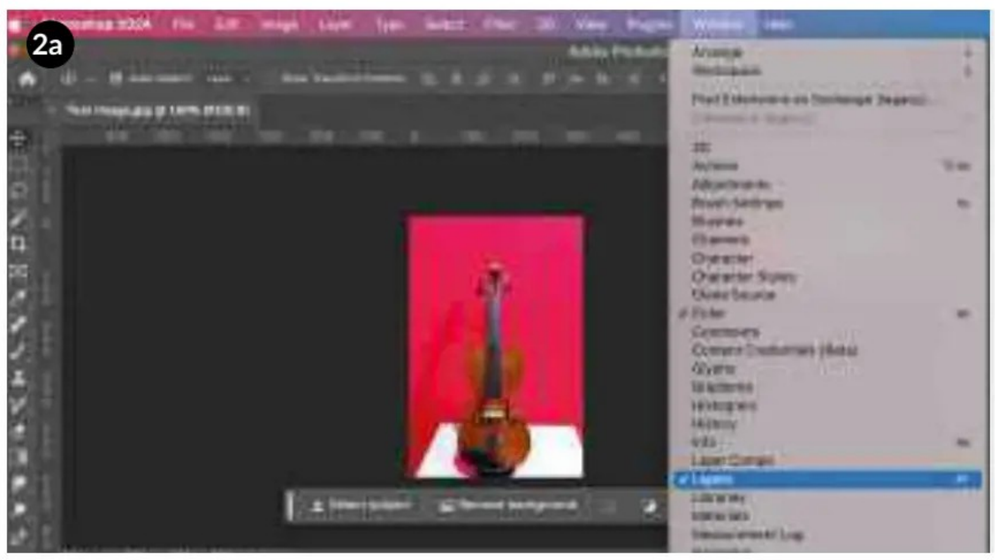
Opening the image file

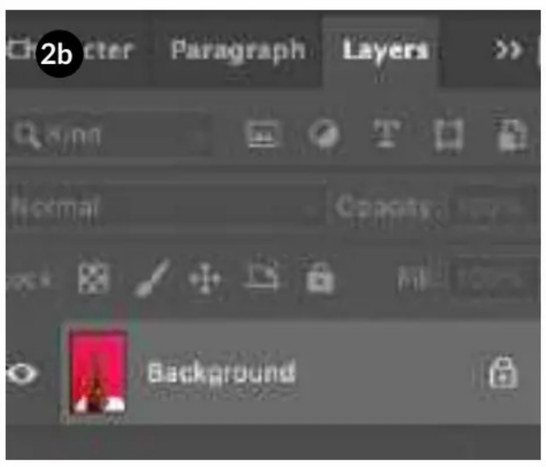


1 Launch Photoshop, go to File > Open, and locate the image on your computer. Next to the filename you will see either 'RGB' or 'CMYK'. Make a mental note of this, as you will have to change it at the end of the process if your image is for digital or print output. ▹

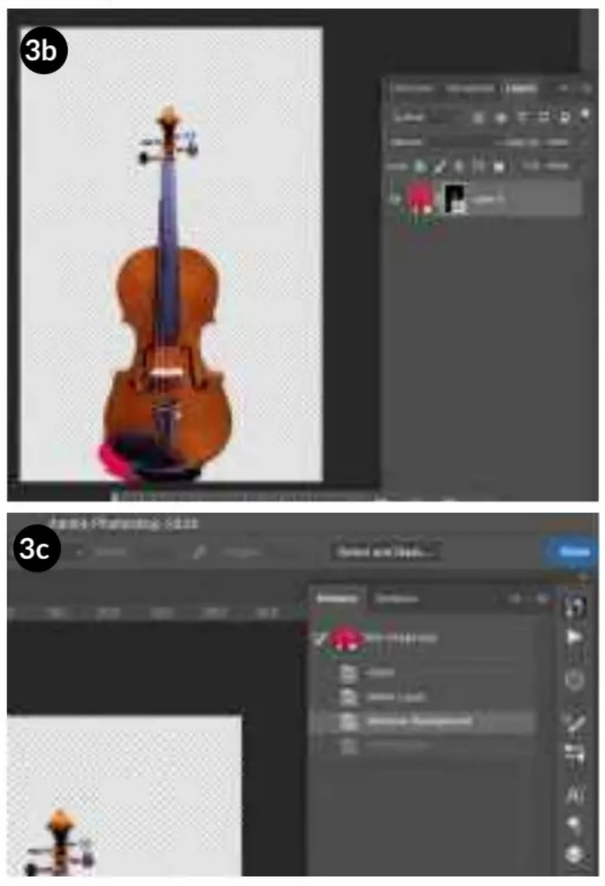
2 Photoshop has many windows. If you don't already have a tools panel open on your screen, go to Window > Layers (2a). Then check if the image has layers (Layer 1, Layer 2 etc.). If there are, hide them by clicking on the eye tool. Only keep the layer you want to work on. Also, if any of the layers have a padlock symbol next to them (2b), click on it to unlock the layer.

The Layers panel





Removing the background for a quick edit

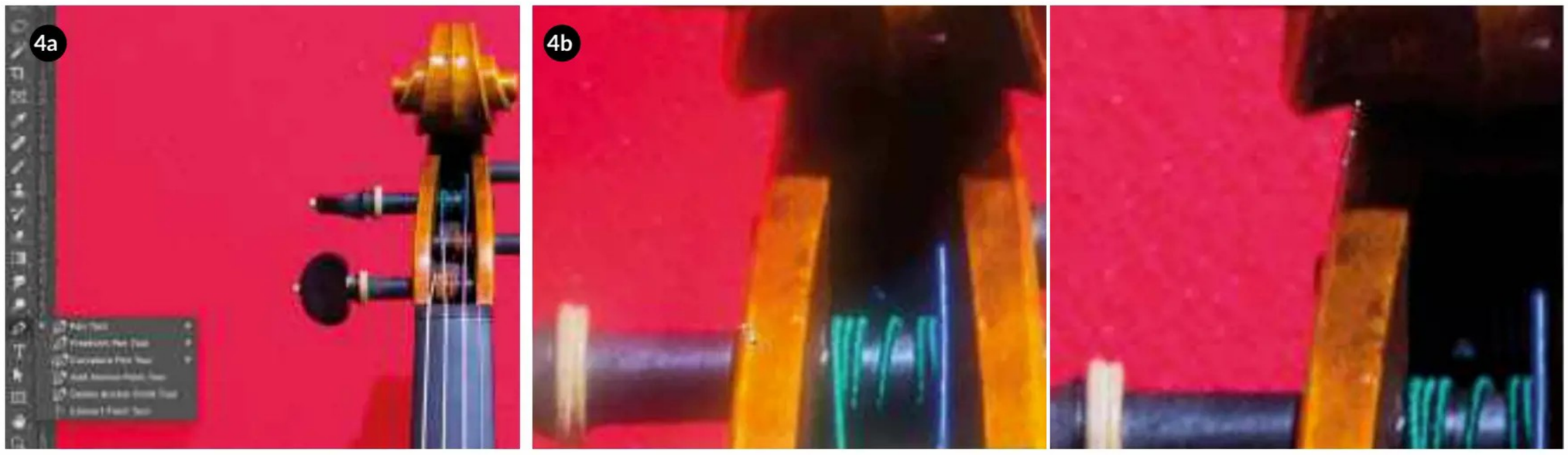


3 If you are using the image for a quick, non-detailed shape, you can try this very quick method to remove the background. In the example I am removing the red and shadow, but this method loses the detail in the violin and results in a jagged edge around the side.

Double-click the Layers panel. Open Window > Properties, and click on the button 'Remove background' (3a). Although this removes the background (3b), you can see a little red of the background remaining at the base of the violin.

To undo anything you're not happy with, go to Edit > Undo. You can also click on Window > History and you'll see a list of the steps you've performed so far (3c). Just click back to wherever you want to be.

The pen tool

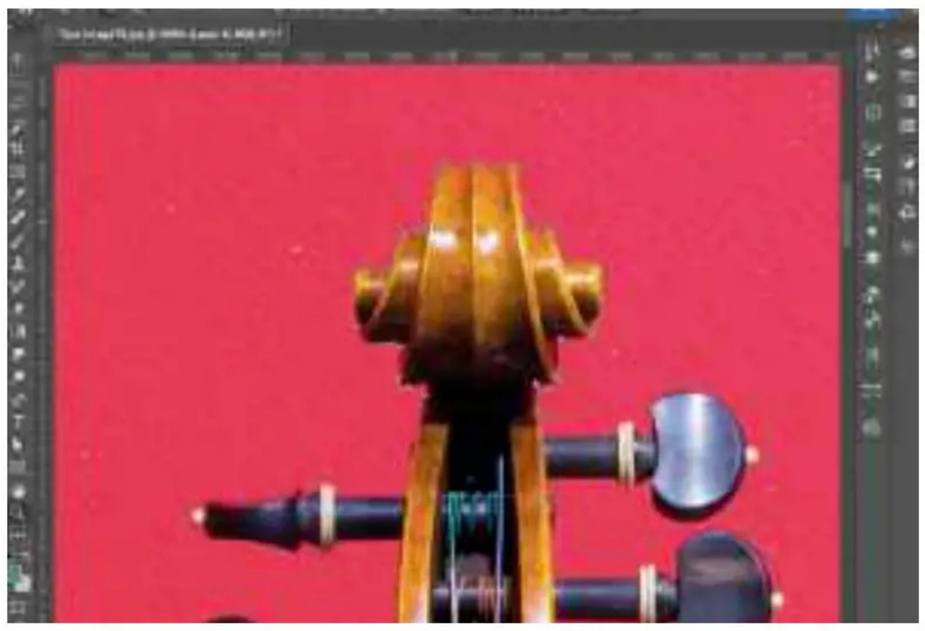


4 Now let's try an accurate way to create an isolated image. Locate the pen tool in the tool palette. Click and hold down the pen symbol to make the various pen selections appear. Choose the 'Pen Tool' (4a).

Now zoom into your image to begin removing the background. You will be using your keyboard to help this process, and to eliminate clicking on the tool palette so much.

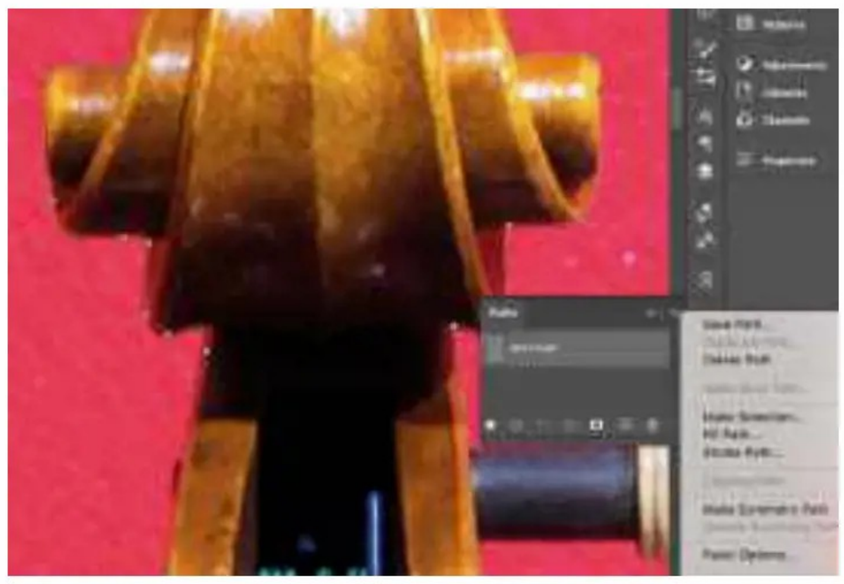
Click your pen tool on the starting point of where you want to draw the shape that you want to isolate. Click the first point, then the second. If you want to correct a point's location, you can do this by holding down the CTRL key of your keyboard ('Option' on a Mac). You will notice the pen tool changes to an arrow. Then click and hold on the point, and move it to the new location.

Outline the subject or object of your focus



5 Continue making your path around the shape. Here I'm only going to cut out the scroll. When you arrive at the final point, connect to your first pen tool mark. Hover over it and you will see a circle appear. Click on it to close the path.

Isolate your image

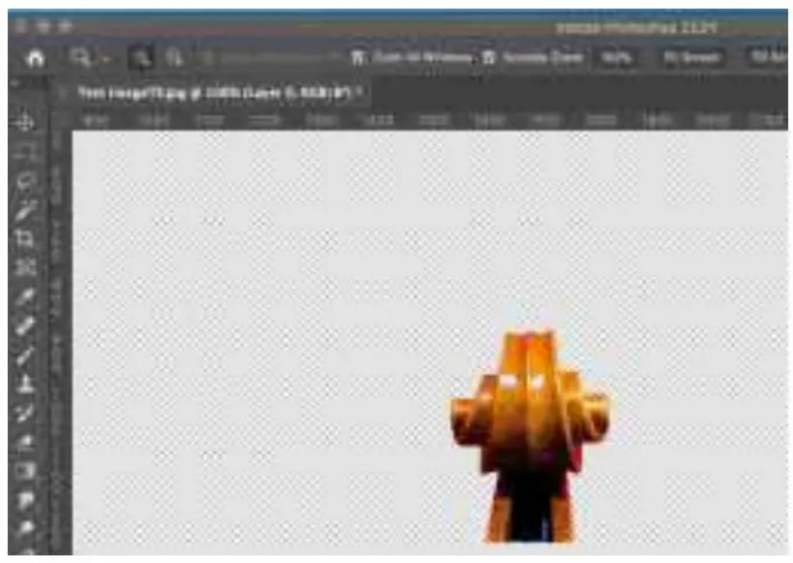


6 Now that the path is closed and we have our isolation shape, it is good practice to create a softer edge to the cut-out, rather than a harsh one. For this step, locate the Path Selection tool. Click on Work Path. Then in the top left of this tool click the dropdown menu and select 'Make Selection'. A pop-up window appears. Choose a Feather Radius of 0.5 and click OK.

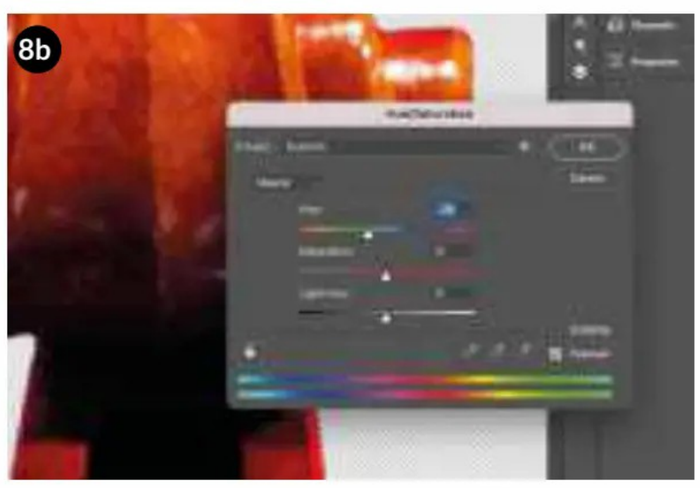
7 You will see the outline come to life – it looks like it is moving. Now we need to remove the background. Go to Select > Inverse and then the Delete key (Backspace on a Mac). Hold down the Command Key and press D at the same time to access the image.

Saving the image file depends on how and where you intend to use it. If it is for digital, leave it as RGB. If for print, save it as CMYK. First go to Image > Mode > CMYK. Then click File > Save. Save it as a Photoshop (PSD) file, as this will retain the transparent background. Also, save the image at a press-ready file size: 300dpi. (File > Image > Image size)

Saving the file



Colour correction



8 There are times when you need to colour-correct the image. If you have the original instrument in front of you, try to match it exactly with the colours on screen.

There are so many ways to change and edit colour in Photoshop. If you look in the 'Adjustments' section of the Image dropdown, you will find 'Colour Balance', 'Levels' and 'Selective Colour'. All of these could be used.

One easy method is to use Image > Adjustments > Hue/Saturation, which brings up a colourful window. If you require a little more yellow on your instrument, move the Hue slider to the right (8a). If you want it warmer by adding red, slide to the left (8b). If you want to reset the image, click on the Option keypad and 'Cancel in the panel'. It remains open and you can start again.

Photoshop is a great tool to explore. Keep trying various methods to colour-correct your images. You might come up with a work of art to be proud of! ●

Spoilt for choice

A variety of string, bow, shoulder rest and rosin manufacturers present specific ranges that are designed to be the best product you can buy within your price point

PIRASTRO

Affordable

Tonica violin and viola sets

Pirastro's Tonica range is available for both violin and viola. They are available in several sizes to account for growing young musicians. The violin set comes in sizes from 1/32 to full size, while the viola set comes in sizes from half to full size. The strings are made with a nylon core and designed for an easy response, left-hand responsiveness and right-hand articulation. The range also aims for a well-rounded sound, balanced across all four strings. The violin set is wound in a variety of materials, with the standard set including a silvery-steel E string, aluminium-wound A string and silver-wound D and G strings. The viola set's A and D strings are aluminium-wound, the G string is silver-wound and C string tungsten-silver-wound.

Pirastro Tonica violin set from £26
Pirastro Tonica viola set from £41

Flexocor Deluxe cello set

The Flexocor Deluxe strings for cello were made to combine volume with a warm tone and a balanced sound spectrum. They have a soft-to-medium string tension to offer a pleasant playing feel, particularly on the G and C strings. The chrome steel-wound A and D strings have a solid steel core, while the tungsten-wound G and C strings have a rope steel core.

Pirastro Flexocor Deluxe cello set from £150

Perpetual double bass set

The Perpetual double bass strings were designed with a flexible steel rope core and chrome steel winding to achieve versatility. The design is also focused on projection, clear tone and comfortable left-hand feel. The strings are particularly suited for pizzicato, but still appropriate for arco players. For a warm and full tone, the thicker Stark G and D strings are available, as well as a set in Solo tuning.

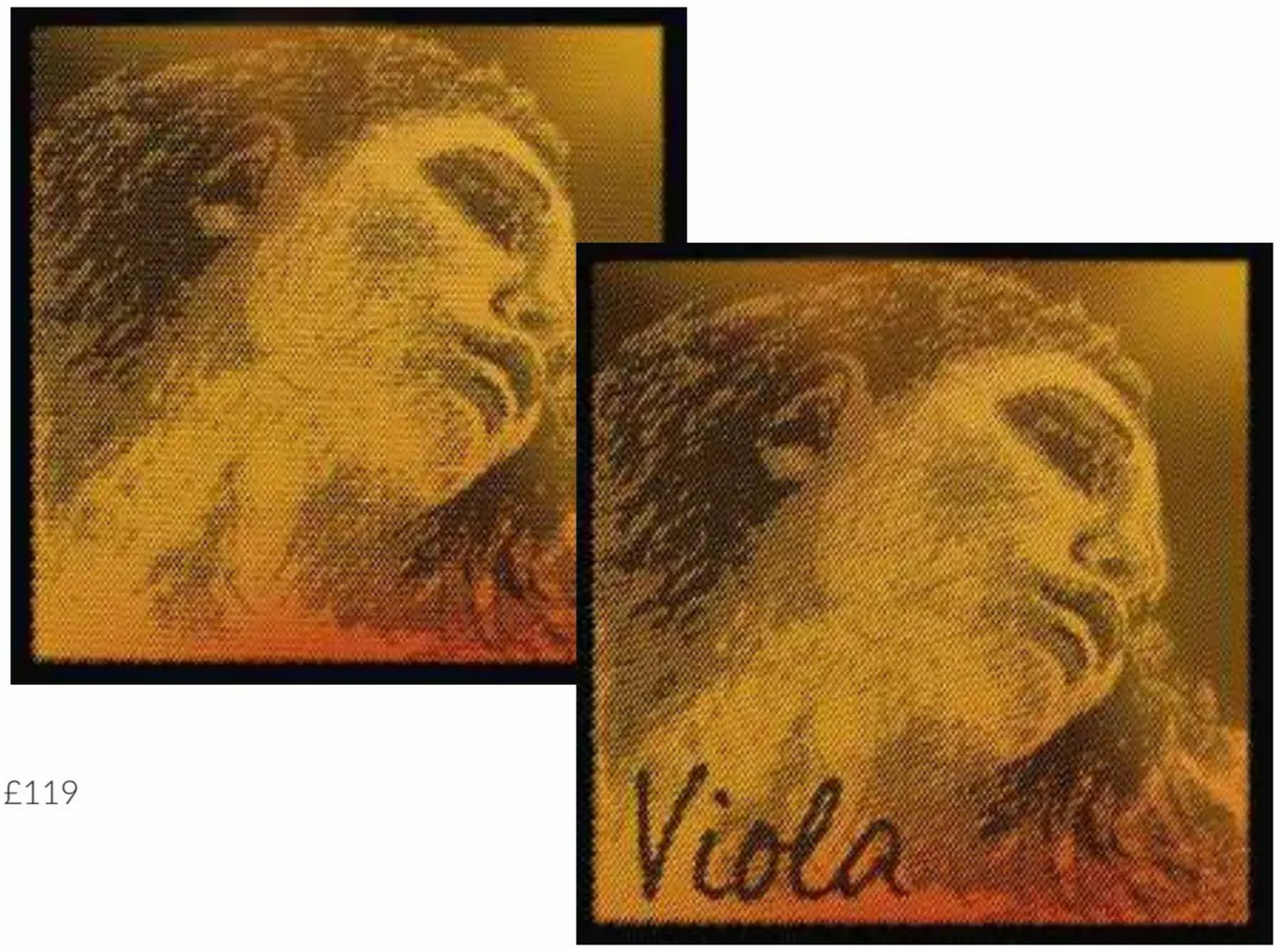
Pirastro Perpetual double bass set from £211
Email info@pirastro.com
Web www.pirastro.com

PIRASTRO GMBH

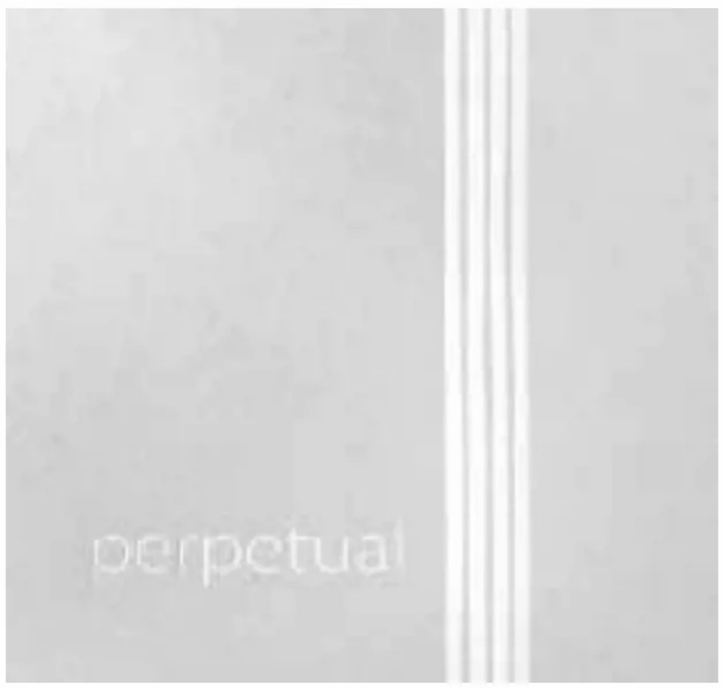
High-end

Evah Pirazzi Gold Set G-Gold violin and Evah Pirazzi Gold viola sets

The Evah Pirazzi Gold set, including a gold G string for violin, has a synthetic core and was designed to offer a full-bodied sound, brilliant tone and a great dynamic range. The set is particularly appropriate for skilled players looking for nuance. Ten years after its release, Pirastro introduced the Evah Pirazzi Gold steel core set for viola in 2022, created to offer a brilliant and direct sound without metallic harshness. The standard viola set comes with a steel A string, synthetic-core D and G strings wound in silver and a C string wound in tungsten-silver. Alternative sets include a rope core/tungsten-wound steel C string and a full steel set.



Pirastro Evah Pirazzi Gold (G-Gold) violin set from £119
Pirastro Evah Pirazzi Gold viola set from £116



Perpetual cello set

The Perpetual set for cello was created with easy playability, flexibility and a wide sound spectrum in mind. The aim was also to offer a long-lasting set, with a harmonious blend between all the strings. To enhance the natural qualities of every cello and playing style, the range includes a variety of sets and alternative strings: Medium, Soloist with an additional A Soloist Soft and Strong, Edition with an extra C Edition Strong to choose, and G and C Cadenza or Stark.

Pirastro Perpetual cello set from £278

Original Flat-Chrome double bass set

The Original Flat-Chrome strings for double bass are especially suited for arco playing, and were created to handle even the most powerful bowing techniques and to offer exceptional tuning stability. As with all of Pirastro's steel-core double bass strings, this set features a high-tensile carbon steel rope core, which is wound in chrome steel. The set is available in both Orchestra and Solo tuning.

Pirastro Original Flat-Chrome double bass set from £325

Email info@pirastro.com
Web www.pirastro.com

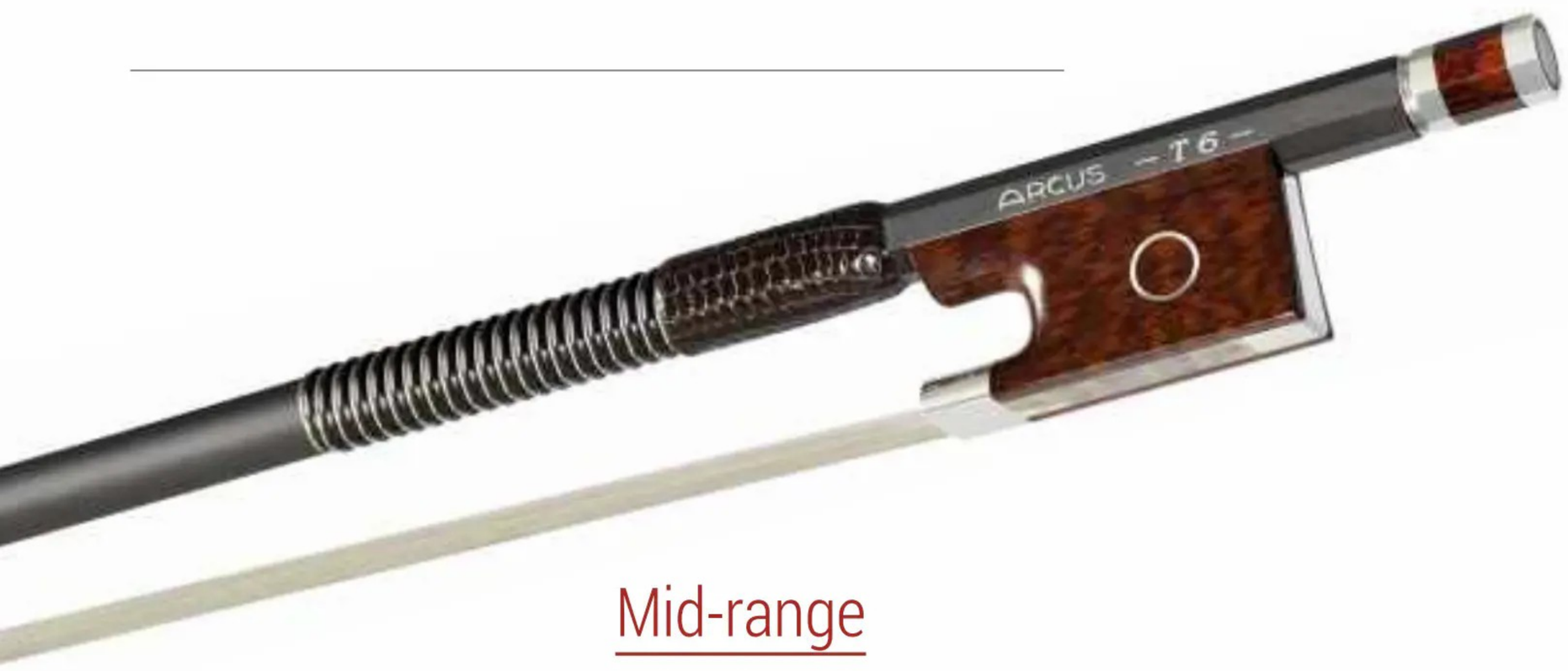
PIRASTRO GMBH

ARCUS AND MÜSING BOWS

Affordable

Müsing bows are designed to cater primarily to the needs of students and amateurs. They offer a flawless and natural playing style combined with same sound as pernambuco bows, while being much more durable. The C3 is one up from the entry model, offering a superior sound and a stainless-steel outfit. The Müsing violin bows weigh around 55 grams and their resiliency is about 50 per cent above traditional bows.

Müsing C3 violin bow €990



Mid-range

The Arcus T6 is the company's best-selling model. With its snakewood frog, full sterling-silver outfit and a sound quality designed to match the finest wooden bows, it is aimed at orchestral players, professional and amateurs alike. It weighs around 51 grams, with a resiliency 80 per cent above the strongest wooden bows. Among the wide range of Arcus bows, the T-series is designed to offer a sound that equally balances brilliance with warmth.

Arcus T6 violin bow €2,400

High-end

A step up from the T6, the Arcus T9 is the company's top-of-the-range model and offers a full solid-gold outfit and superior sound. The bow is designed to bring out the best possible tonal palette and superior power, projection and clarity when put to the string. The T9 is aimed at soloists, concertmasters, or those with ambitions to win competitions or excel in auditions.

Arcus T9 violin bow €8,500

Email **contact via website**

Web **www.arcus-muesing.de**

LARSEN STRINGS

Affordable

Aurora violin set

Targeted towards all ages, Larsen's Aurora violin strings were designed for fast response and a balance between brilliance, warmth, breadth and focus. Both medium and strong tensions are available in full size, while medium tensions are available in fractional sizes from 1/16 to 3/4. The E string features a bespoke carbon-steel core, the aluminium-wound A string has a synthetic core, and the G string comes in a silver winding. The D string comes in either double-wound aluminium or an aluminium and silver winding.

Larsen Strings Aurora Violin Strings (Medium Silver) €42.36 excl. VAT

Mid-range

Il Cannone Direct & Focused violin set

Larsen's Direct & Focused version of its Il Cannone medium and soloist strings were created to offer a clearer, brighter and more direct sound than the original Il Cannone range. The Direct & Focused's synthetic core is a new development and winding materials have been processed with a new method to enrich the set's colours. It was created to be the most versatile set in the Larsen violin range, and is recommended for the demanding professional.

Larsen Strings Il Cannone Direct & Focused violin set €85.91 excl. VAT

High-end

Il Cannone Gold violin set

The Il Cannone Gold violin set features the first ever gold-wound D string, which Larsen describes as powerful with lots of body, while also offering softer dynamics. The G string is also made with a high-grade gold alloy, with a bespoke synthetic core to suit the heavy winding. The upper strings' materials were chosen to complement the D and G strings: the carbon-steel E for more focus, and the A for clarity.

Larsen Strings Il Cannone Gold violin set €385.88 excl. VAT

Email larsenstrings@larsenstrings.com

Web www.larsenstrings.com

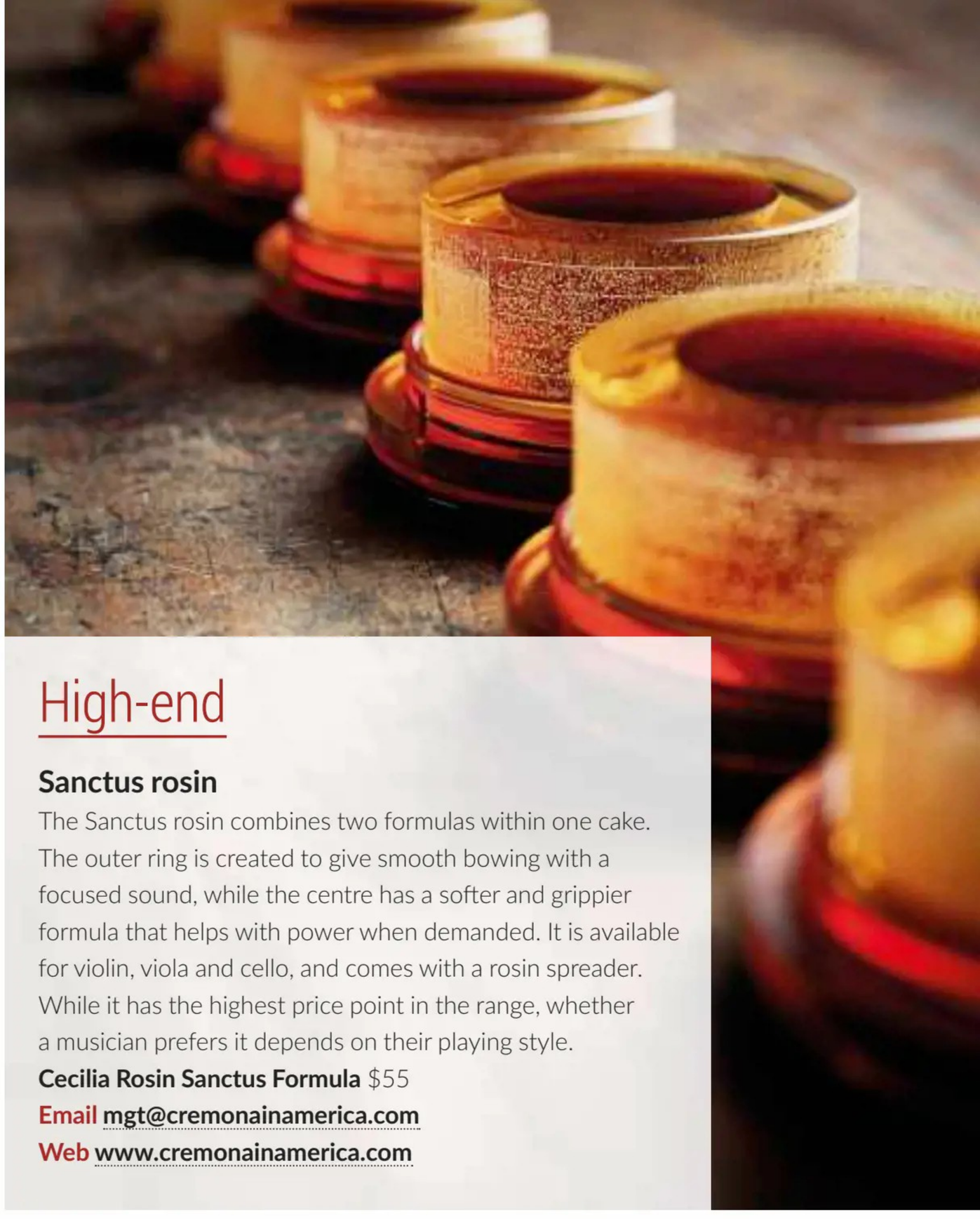
CECILIA ROSIN

Affordable

Mini rosins

Cecilia Rosin offers mini versions of its Signature, SOLO and A Piacere versions. The Signature is formulated for clear bowing response with full and rich tones, the SOLO for strong projection and articulation, and the A Piacere for a relatively warmer and more blended sound than the SOLO. They are available for violin, viola and cello and can be purchased with a rosin spreader.

Cecilia Rosin mini rosins from $29



High-end

Sanctus rosin

The Sanctus rosin combines two formulas within one cake. The outer ring is created to give smooth bowing with a focused sound, while the centre has a softer and grippier formula that helps with power when demanded. It is available for violin, viola and cello, and comes with a rosin spreader. While it has the highest price point in the range, whether a musician prefers it depends on their playing style.

Cecilia Rosin Sanctus Formula $55

Email **mgt@cremonainamerica.com**

Web **www.cremonainamerica.com**

KUN

Affordable

Super rest

The Kun Super rest combines a streamlined shape with ultra-fine width adjustment. The aim with this rest is to offer an exceptional set-up that won't break the bank. The lightweight Super rest pivots, while its width positioning is designed for stability and to ensure comfort and peace of mind during practice and performance. The rest is available in the following sizes: viola, violin ¼ and violin ½ and ¾, and while it doesn't fold, its slender shape allows it to fit in most instrument cases.

Kun Super rest from $29.75

High-end

Bravo rest

Launched in 1999, Kun's Bravo rest features an elegant design and is made from the highest-quality materials. Its bent laminate base is hand-finished in flamed maple and pairs with the resonant brass fittings to enhance the sound of your instrument. It is available for full-size violin and viola and comes in standard and folding versions.

Kun Bravo rest from $85.25

Email **contact via website**

Web **www.kunrest.com**

PIRASTRO KorfkerRest® LUNA®

The ultimate in sound and comfort

Stay tuned

Feather light

only 32 grams

Instantly comfortable and featherlight

Simple click-system for easy and secure size adjustment

Outstanding freedom and integrity of sound

pirastro-shoulderrests.com

SEIT 1798

PIRASTRO®

MUSIKSAITEN

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www.pirastro.com

CONCERTO

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After years of rosin recipe refinement for string players all over the world, the Leatherwood Bespoke Rosin team have worked to create the ultimate rosin recipe for the Concerto Soloist and International Competition Performer. When performing in these settings, there are even more demands on the rosin such as projecting the sound to all corners of the concert hall, conveying warmth of sound up close and far away, and the ability of the rosin to endure a long performance with minimal deterioration to the sound quality right through to the last note!

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"Concerto by Leatherwood Bespoke Rosin is truly extraordinary; I've never used anything like it! So potent but also refined, so pure. Just a little bit of touch up every morning makes the hair feel renewed. It has been a real joy using it, and I highly recommend it!"

James Ehnes - International Soloist
Violin: "Marsick" Stradivarius of 1715.

Image © Benjamin Ealovega

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The Young Talent range from Jargar Strings includes both violin and cello sets. The former is available for ¼- to full-size violins, while the latter is available from ¼- to ¾-size cellos. The strings are targeted towards beginner and intermediate students and therefore created with easy playability in mind. Both violin and cello sets are also designed to offer a clear and focused sound, while keeping a mellow character. All violin strings have a synthetic core except for the carbon steel-cored E string. And in the cello set, all strings have a carbon steel core.

Jargar Strings Young Talent violin set €44.15
Jargar Strings Young Talent cello set €128.46

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The recently released Evoke range is available for both violin and cello. Designed as a high-end string, it is particularly suitable for high-level students due to the range's playability. Jargar aims to offer a brilliant sound with the Evoke, without sacrificing warmth. Both sets are also created to have an easy response that allows the player to express different colours and sounds fluently. The violin set features a steel-core E string, alloy-wound, synthetic-core A string, and silver-wound, synthetic-core D and G strings. In the cello set, the A and D strings have a carbon steel core and are multi alloy-wound, while the spiral-cored G and C strings are wound with tungsten and nickel.

Jargar Strings Evoke violin set €86.49
Jargar Strings Evoke cello set €317.35
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SMOOTH OPERATOR

Before applying the first layer of varnish, ground coat or even primer to an instrument, the wood surface must first be prepared. **Narelle Freeman** examines some of the options for luthiers, and argues that *equisetum hyemale* provides the best results

Equisetum hyemale growing wild in Scotland

Freshly harvested *Equisetum hyemale*

One of the most debated issues within the violin making community concerns the varnish. Yet these discussions are not all about what it's made of or how to apply it. Many hours can be spent contemplating, debating and experimenting with the finishing of the wood surfaces prior to varnishing, after which we have a violin 'in the white'. This is an important foundation stage which has a considerable impact on how the final varnish will look and feel. Many luthiers consult the historical records of the old Italians for inspiration and guidance, and there are many myths and legends that contemporary makers often draw on. Here we find references to the use of a particular grass in the process of finishing a violin in the white, which we have come to ascribe to the plant *equisetum hyemale*, or 'rough horsetail' to give it its common name. Undertaking historical research

to inform our current practices is a great place to start; however, following the clues as to how it was done in the past doesn't automatically bring with it an understanding of *why*, nor of *how*, to make decisions regarding which practice is best for which circumstances in our own workshops today.

Finishing is a process that brings makers up close with the wood we are using in a very specific way. Understanding how to highlight the grain in different ways for different reasons creates a space where we can appreciate the materials we work with on a deeper level. Through this process we can connect with each individual violin on our workbench, and make choices that celebrate its unique structure and origin as well as the history of our craft. I believe it is important to be able to make these choices in an informed and deliberate way, so that we are then able to enjoy executing these processes with skill and confidence. This approach brings with it a greater chance of achieving the result we are aiming for. When I have taught violin making, I have often seen many beautifully crafted violins being disregarded because of disappointing finishing and varnishing (this includes my own student work). These processes are not easy to master, yet their success will ultimately determine whether a player will pick up your instrument, or not.

So, how do techniques for finishing a violin in the white impact on the final varnish? For the answer to this, we need to look closely at the cellular structure of the wood and understand how each technique will change its surface in preparation for varnishing. Before we venture down that rabbit hole, we need to take a step back and clarify what violin makers are generally trying to achieve with their varnish.

If you have ever examined a violin crafted by one of the great Italian masters, you can appreciate the stunning quality of their varnishes, which just cannot be captured in photos. They have a brilliant depth of colour while remaining strikingly transparent, such that they truly enhance the beauty of the wood underneath. These two aspects of varnish do not normally go hand in hand. Here is where the tricky part begins: achieving this depth of colour either requires increased levels of pigment within the varnish itself, or increasing the depth of the varnish – or both. However, these options decrease the transparency of the varnish. Another option is increasing the depth of colour at the wood's surface, but there is the risk that if it is not done well, it will 'kill' the movement of the treasured flame in the maple, and produce uneven dark patches at the end-grain areas of the arched spruce front. Modern varnishes and lacquers overcome these difficulties through various materials and techniques that aren't really an option for violin makers. Apart from the obvious visual mismatch with the ethos of a hand-crafted instrument, it impacts on the violin's sound quality. This means we must master the skills and materials that have been used within the lutherie tradition for centuries. And this takes understanding and time.

ACHIEVING THIS DEPTH OF COLOUR EITHER REQUIRES INCREASED LEVELS OF PIGMENT WITHIN THE VARNISH ITSELF, OR INCREASING THE DEPTH OF THE VARNISH – OR BOTH

As I mentioned earlier, historical research is helpful in developing understanding, but some modern research can also provide valuable insights. First, understanding how light reflects and refracts means we can make important decisions around the varnish we use – but also, and more importantly, about how we finish the wood's surface. When the surface is rough, light coming through the varnish reflects back at a variety of angles from the rough areas, and appears more diffuse or less transparent. When using a clear resin varnish finished to a smooth surface, this can be overcome by applying one with a low molecular weight. However, if there are more particles within the varnish, such as colour pigments, then the number of different angles of reflection increases once more – as seen in **figure 1**.

From these research studies, we can reason that the smoother the wood's surface, the more transparent the varnish will appear. The choice of varnish is obviously the most important aspect of the violin's final appearance, but if transparency is what you are aiming for, smoothing the wood's surface as much as possible ▹

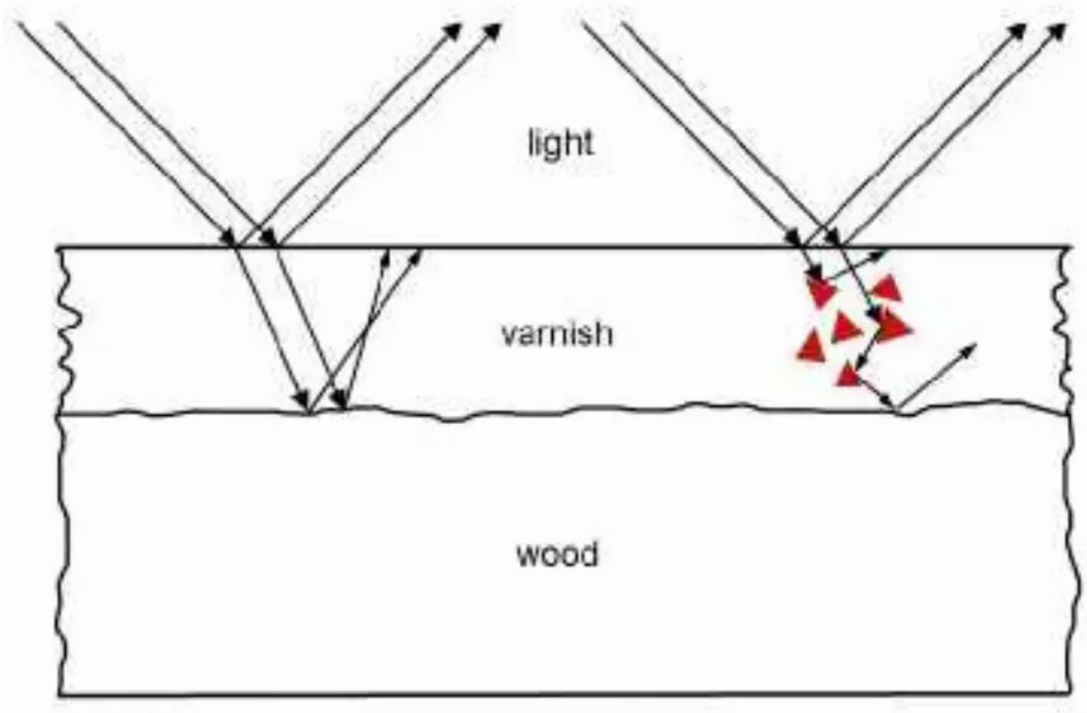

FIGURE 1 How the particles in a varnish can increase the number of angles of reflection

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will provide the essential foundation. It also enables us to apply coloured grounds more evenly, and without killing the flame.

So, what exactly is meant by 'smoothing' the wood's surface? At this point we have circled back to the theory about looking at the cellular structure of the wood, and to the use of equisetum. First, though, we need to establish some key terms and processes. Before finishing the wood's surface, we need to shape it by the process of selectively removing wood. This can be done by cutting, chiselling, gouging, planing, rasping, filing, scraping, using abrasives (e.g. sandpaper) and more. We progressively move from taking smaller and smaller bits of wood away through each process, until we have the desired shape.

Once we have finished shaping by removing wood, then we can 'smooth' the surface. This is burnishing. To burnish something is to rub the surface until it is smooth. There is no removal of material; the cellular structure of the wood is simply 'deformed' so that it is compressed and therefore looks smooth and shiny. Let's take a closer look at some of these processes and how they affect wood at a cellular level.

As spruce has a broad range of densities across the annual growth rings, it offers a useful way of demonstrating how the wood density impacts on the efficacy of each of these processes. We can then extrapolate these results to different wood species. As can be seen from **Table 1**, if you are looking to smooth the surface, then burnishing is the process of choice. I used a bone handle for these small experiments but there are other options, such as plain paper. The harder you burnish, the more compressed the wood becomes, and the shinier the surface will appear. If you want your varnished violin to look extremely smooth and shiny, this is the process for you. You could also burnish specific areas to achieve this type of look in targeted areas. One step back in smoothness from burnishing is using a scraper after planing. I have known makers who use this combination of processes to finish shaping, and then they burnish their violins (not quite as vigorously as I have in these photos) so that they can compress the wood enough to apply ground colours evenly, directly to the wood.

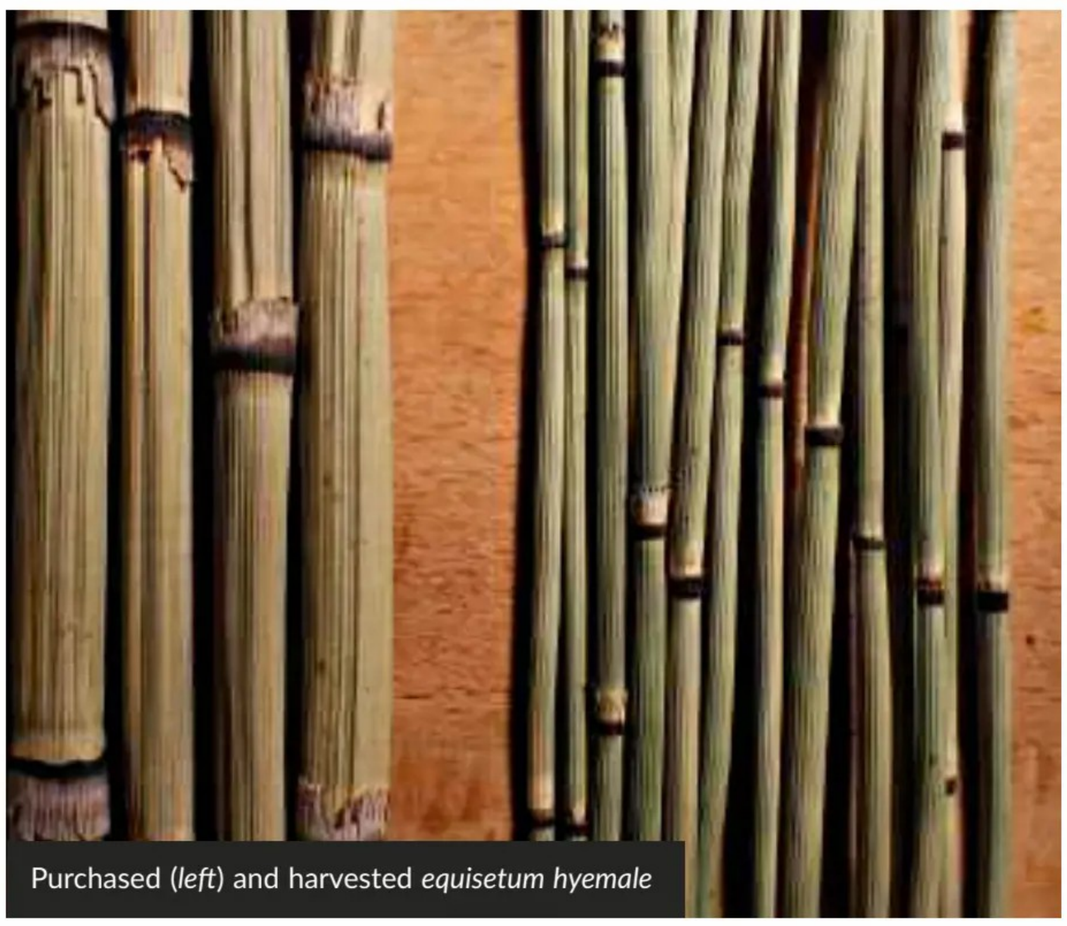
Returning to equisetum, we can see a similar result to 400-grit sandpaper. It is a good abrasive for the removal of small amounts of wood and works as such through the plant's natural accumulations of silica on ridges all around the circumference that extend along the length of the stalk.

If your preference is to not use modern abrasives then equisetum is a good alternative. But be warned: it is not a convenient one! I like to take my time to enjoy the process of hand-crafting my instruments, but after sourcing, drying and processing equisetum, I would question whether it was worth the effort. I will leave that for you to decide, and in the meantime I will explain how.

MANY PEOPLE TALK OF REHYDRATING THE STALK, SO THAT YOU CAN CUT IT OPEN INTO A FLAT PIECE WITHOUT IT BREAKING

Firstly, it is of the utmost importance that you source *equisetum hyemale* and not any of the other equisetum species, as this is the one that has the greatest accumulation of silica. To find out where *equisetum hyemale* grows near you, search the NBN Atlas (nbnatlas.org), which will provide geographical maps of where each species has been reported. When heading out, be aware of whether the plant is growing on public land or not, and if you need permission to harvest any. It is also prudent to take only as much as you need, and not disturb the local flora. I found some growing by the banks of Tarras Water near Auchenrivock in the south-west of Scotland.

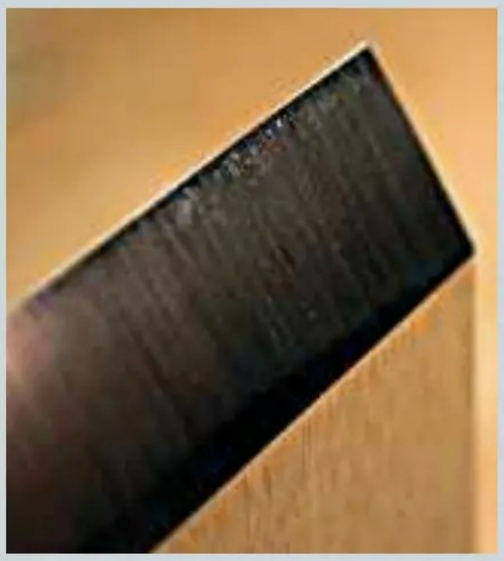
There are also online suppliers who offer good-sized specimens, which I found useful as all of the plants growing ▹

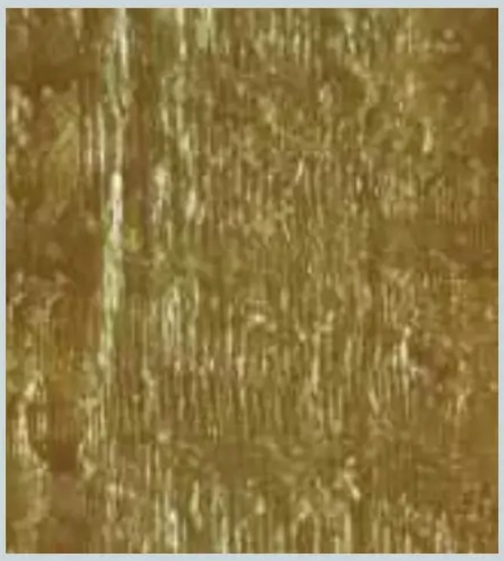


Purchased (*left*) and harvested *equisetum hyemale*

The plant can frequently be found by river banks

TABLE 1. EFFECTS OF VARIOUS MATERIALS ON PLANED SPRUCE


Plane blade edge

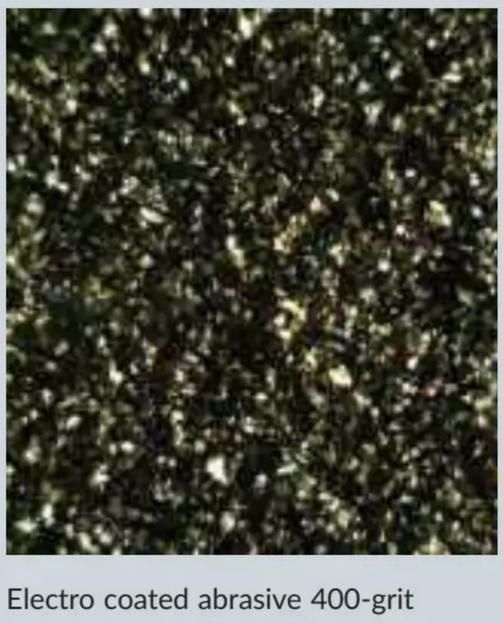

Planed spruce

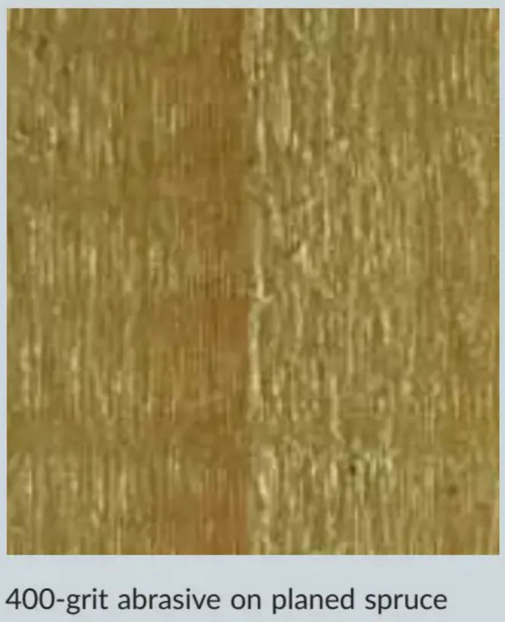
Equisetum hyemale

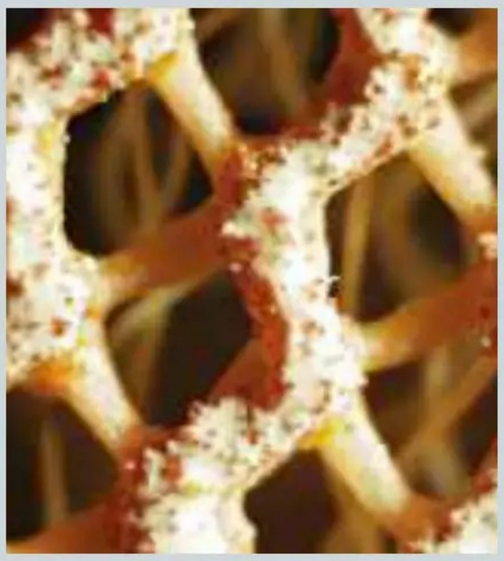
Equisetum hyemale on planed spruce

Sharkskin

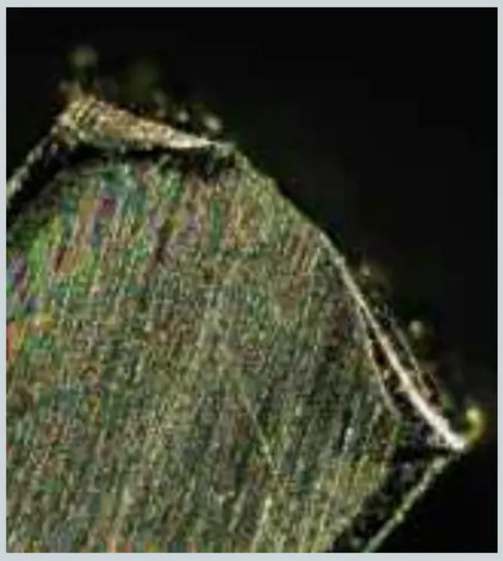
Sharkskin on planed spruce


Electro coated abrasive 400-grit (wet & dry sandpaper)


400-grit abrasive on planed spruce


Abranet abrasive 400-grit

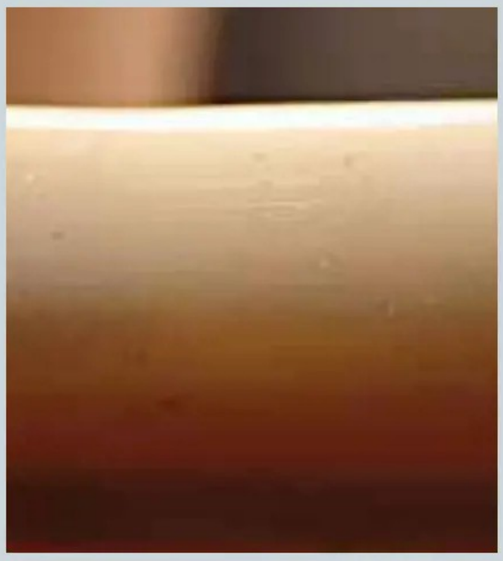
Abranet 400-grit on planed spruce


Metal scraper edge

Metal scraper on planed spruce

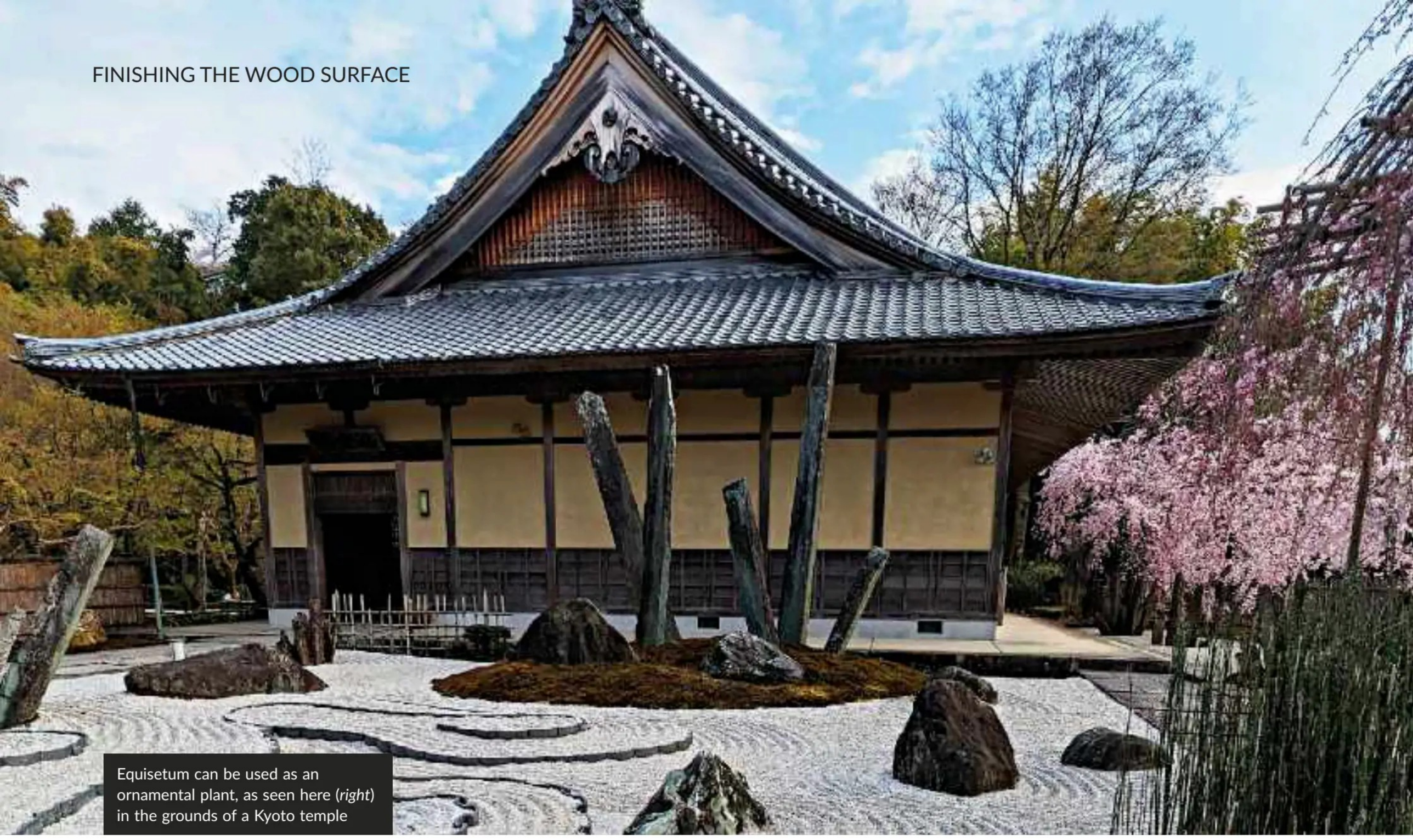
StewMac metal sharkskin

StewMac metal sharkskin on planed spruce


Bone handle burnisher

Planed, scraped and burnished spruce

RIVERBANK PHOTO GETTY. ALL OTHER PHOTOS NARELLE FREEMAN



Equisetum can be used as an ornamental plant, as seen here (*right*) in the grounds of a Kyoto temple

anywhere near where I live were quite slender. This means processing was very difficult and resulted in only very small pieces that were usable. See the photo on page 48 for comparison.

There are already online videos and forum chats that discuss various ways of processing the stalks into flat pieces for use, which I would suggest rather than duplicating the information here. Many people talk of rehydrating the stalk, so that you can cut it open into a flat piece without it breaking. However, when I spent some time in the workshop of Yannick Chastang, the internationally renowned conservator and specialist in European marquetry furniture, his brief demonstration didn't require such efforts. Interestingly, *equisetum hyemale* has also been used in the furniture making trade for centuries; Yannick suggested it was never used on bare wood but was more useful in finishing plasterwork. Imagine trying to finish a whole table with just a one-inch square piece!

Luckily a violin doesn't present quite such a challenge. That is not to say that finishing a violin is not challenging; indeed, it is one of the most difficult things I have ever done, particularly so when I try to realise very specific results with my varnish. Achieving the desired levels of transparency and depth of colour when varnishing is actually quite tricky technically, and requires different knowledge and skills from the woodworking side of violin making. However, through investigation, discussion, experimentation and practice I have managed to develop a better understanding of my materials, which has enabled me to achieve the results I had been aiming for – starting with the finishing. I hope that this brief discussion has inspired you to take the time to experiment and enjoy the process too, but at the same time has given you a bit of a head start so that you also don't have to face disregarding your violins after many hours of intense labour. ●

NARELLE FREEMAN

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